THE TRANSGRESSION OF TERENCE CLANCY.
The Transgression of Terence Clancy.

BY

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"Good thoughts (though God accept them) yet towards men are little better than good dreams, except they be put in act."—Bacon.

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Vol. I.

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OWN by Chilling Water, where a great brown moor ends abruptly in a deep combe, and oak coppices feather down from the bald foreheads of the hills as though to embrace and shelter the laughing river, stands Little Chillington. It is a market town, with a high respect for itself, as being picturesque, well-to-do, and the centre of a large district; and also as possessing many historical associations. Its climate is said by strangers to be enervating, and admitted
by local persons of exceptional candour to be a little damp towards the end of a wet winter. Yet the place has thriven pretty well during several centuries, and now boldly fronts the gaze of travellers by the down express trains, with its two churches, the ancient Gothic and the modern Romanesque, its old ivy-clad town hall, and many desirable villas straggling up the steep hills from the clustered roofs of the lower town.

Upon this comely little place the June sun was blazing one afternoon not so very long ago, and very peaceful and slumbrous it looked. Nothing but the leaping stream seemed to have life and motion. Not a soul was visible in the broad space by the town hall, or even on Chillington bridge, the chosen lounging-place of a talkative town; while down on the emerald strip of meadow beyond the houses the lazy red cattle dozed and chewed undisturbed. The place, in its present aspect, seemed to justify the popular
conception of a country townsman as a creature belonging rather to the vegetable than the animal kingdom—a nerveless, lifeless being, with slow sap creeping through his system in place of warm life-blood. Yet it is but a mock peace, a mirage of stagnation, that broods over the quietest of country towns. In the moon one reads of a great plain called "Mare Tranquillitatis," but in our own planet we find neither sea, nor plain, nor any corner of absolute tranquillity—or, at least, one must go further than Chillington to find so desirable a haven.

This afternoon, for instance, in the very first house of the town, as you approach it from below—the humble, ugly stuccoed little place that abuts upon the riverside meadows, there was going forward, as we shall presently hear, a conversation betraying discontent and other human weaknesses by no means consonant with a state of idyllic peace.

The house was at present occupied by
one of Chillington's many doctors. The little place, embracing in its neighbourhood many moorland and sub-moorland villages, supported quite a nosegay of medical men; and this was the youngest of the bunch, the last importation from London, who at present blushed unseen, his practice consisting mainly of unpaid work seasoned by hope. His name was John Syme, and he was just now engaged in lounging upon the sill of his open parlour window, alternately discoursing with a friend and gazing out at the lazy cattle in the meadow below.

The sunlit landscape offered little attraction to John Syme. He would sooner have looked out upon a street—a place with some life in it, with small boys jeering and fighting, and dogs getting lashed now and then by passing drivers. Nor did his general appearance suggest any leanings towards the idyllic or pastoral; indeed, he was simply a broad-backed, thick-lipped young man,
with a rollicking, toss-pot air about him, though withal a waggishness that went far to redeem his coarseness. He was no model, you might have said at once, for an artist of the yearning school; yet Franz Hals would have liked him well enough, and perhaps have immortalized Jack Syme as a jolly drinker, pewter in hand and clay pipe in mouth.

The parlour outside which Jack's legs were dangling was a common little room, with scanty furniture of a vivid grass-green; and, in spite of the open window, was sufficiently malodorous, its whisky-fumes chastely blending with a powerful combination of smells wafted from the small surgery across the passage. As he drummed his heels against the wall of his mansion, he was smoking a short black pipe and listening with his half-jocular, half-insolent grin to the talk of a friend who sat inside.

"Go on, Terence," he exclaimed, when
the other voice ceased for a moment; "give us more of your blarney, for 'tis mighty refreshing. Your talk is like fizzing drink to me in this dull hole, where nothing ever happens. And I'm precious lucky to get your company for an hour now you're so mighty popular, ain't I, Terence? Why, hang me, if you could be more sought after with a fine property and twenty thousand a year! You're making quite a splash in the neighbourhood, ain't you, me boy? Thick with all the big county people; staying at Monks Damerel Hall with the great Sir Hamo himself; his son your intimate friend, loving you like a brother and shoving you into the arms of great ladies like Mrs. French-Chichester. Aha! you're exploiting the district, prospecting for a practice, as I know very well; making wonderful strides, too, with the ladies all in a flutter about your winning laugh and piquant brogue. And the picturesque figure you cut, with the
bit o' land in old Ireland to talk about; the poor tenants who mustn't be squeezed; the poverty patiently borne in consequence! A mighty pretty figure, indeed, a sort of fairy-tale prince done into real flesh and blood, damme!"

There was a laugh from within, full of mirth and sunny good-temper; at once rich and soft, and far too fine for that vulgar little chamber.

"Yet I don't fear you, Terence, old boy. You're a love's-young-dream of a doctor—too bright, too fair to last; too gentle and pleasing and pretty for this cold hard world."

Again the bright laugh, brimming over as with spring sunshine.

"There, there, Jack Syme, don't be for trying sarcasm. Fat beasts shouldn't gambol, but just chew on respectfully, as you see them doing by the stream yonder."

Syme grinned again, then laughed boisterously.
"Terence, if I'm a fat beast, you're just the shallow stream he drinks from: bright and sparkling as the Chilling Water, also swift-changing, hard to catch hold of, and mighty shallow in some places! Ah, I know you, Terence. I know your little game. You're angling for a practice down here."

"A man must live, Jack."

"Ay, and a man of our sort must live well. We like refined society; we have a taste for captivating people and being made much of. We like horseflesh, and know how to spend royally in several directions. Our practice must be good to support all this. And then there's one thing we don't like, and that's the most important factor in the situation—hard work."

"Ye're jealous, Jack Syme. By the powers, ye're a jealous ox!"

But Syme only knocked the ashes out of his pipe and laughed the louder; for certainly
his friend possessed that kind of witchery which gives a man the privilege of free speech to all and sundry, and makes it as difficult for him to give offence as for a pretty child or a fascinating woman. From the lips of Terence Clancy even an accusation seemed to tinkle like a compliment.

"Jealous?" Jack Syme continued. "Yes, jealous of your popularity and powers of fascination, confound you! but not professionally so, Terence. Jealous as a fellow-man and a fellow-fool, but not as a doctor. Because, mind you, I don't believe in your future success. You have pace of the lightning order, but no stay. That's where we Saxon tyrants beat you; we're stolid, hard, unsympathetic over here, but we're dogged. You have the brightness and blarney of the Emerald Isle, but no sticking-power, no grip. And I think there's a hole where your moral principle ought to be, though I'm not sure yet—-"
“Thanks for the doubt. Go on, Jack; don’t mind my feelings.”

“Now, mark me,” cried the other, striking fist on knee and leaning forward, “you’re throwing a line on blank water. You’ll never live by the profession. There’s only one way of getting the easy life your nature craves for and will have, and that’s well-gilt matrimony.”

“I’m thinking you’re right, Jack.” There was a sudden almost feminine change of tone in Terence’s voice. “I hate work—true for you there—and money won’t come without it. Yet there’s neither rest nor peace without cash, for the hair-shirt of a poor gentleman pricks woefully, and has to be worn night and day. What twist in the universe is it that makes human happiness dependent upon filthy lucre? Cash—psha! how I hate the word. Yet without this hateful cash life’s just a treadmill, a jog-jog-jogging along a miserable rut of sordid care
and mean endeavour, and bitter grudging of one’s neighbour’s luck. We poor men, I vow, are no better than ravening wolves, snapping and snarling for the bits that fall from rich men’s tables. Look at me up at the hall—living on the fat of the land, treated like a prince, turning an amiable smile upon every one, and all the time consumed with sneaking envy of Simon Secretan’s big money-bags and broad acres. Faugh! my life up there is nothing but a day-long hypocrisy! And the glow and beauty of life are no more for us, Jack, than the material good things. Upon me conscience, I feel sometimes that, as a genteel pauper, I shouldn’t look too long at a sunset sky! And as for romance, a poor devil like me can’t afford it. I’ll have to marry the first rich old hag that’s fool enough to have me, Jack. I’ve been looking round a bit lately,” he continued, with a quaint glance, half naïve, half sly; “for, you see, I’ve been
introduced to half the county, thanks to Simon Secretan, who is so anxious to push me into a practice. There’s Mrs. French-Chichester, now. She seems to like me a bit, in spite of my carrots.”

“Won’t do, Terence; won’t do at any price. She has taken you up lately, I know; but she’ll drop you again like a red-hot coal in a month or two. Besides, you’d never stick to an old woman like that; you must have youth and beauty, as well as cash, to keep you straight, Master Terence.”

“Find me the possessor of all three, Jack, and I’ll try to put up with her.”

“I have found her.”

“You’re joking?”

“On the contrary, I am about to put you up to a good thing, and at the same time satisfy a little private grudge of my own. There’s more of spite than of jest about me, I assure you.”

“Who is it, Jack? Who’s your beauty-
heiress? I smell romance; and any little jog to the nerves will be acceptable this weather."

"You haven't met the Tredethlyns yet?"

"No; they have been away ever since my arrival in these parts. But I believe they have just returned, and Secretan, who will be home again to-night, is going to introduce me as soon as possible."

"Mr. Tredethlyn is uncommonly well off. I believe there'll be four or five thousand a-year to divide between his two daughters."

"You're thinking of Miss Tredethlyn, then?"

"Certainly not. Miss Kate's a deal too proud to look at a country doctor, and would see through you in no time. I'm thinking of Miss Nell, the favourite—the dark-eyed, dainty little Nell."

"Don't you know that she's engaged to Simon Secretan?"

"Of course I do."
"Then what's the use of my thinking of her?"

"All the use in the world. She doesn't care for him, and is consequently all the more assailable than if perfectly free—or I don't know human nature."

"But he's my friend—the man who has loaded me with kindness. God's truth, man! do you think me such a sneak and a cur as to—to—" There was a loud bang as Clancy started to his feet and his chair fell backwards.

Syme looked out for a moment over the broad meadows, and his teeth gleamed. Then Terence strode to the window, and for the first time became clearly visible.

He was striking-looking, if only for his dazzling complexion, fair and bright as a young girl's, flushed now with a quick generous wrath that became him well. A man of quick emotions, as any one could see at a glance; warm-hearted, responsive, sympa-
thetic. There was something appealing in his face, too, especially about the delicate, sensitive mouth—a look almost of deprecation, as of one anxious for your good opinion; meaning well, yet wanting your help to carry out his meaning. Not a strictly handsome man, but rather what they used to call a "pretty fellow," with the rich red-brown hair that belongs so naturally to his fair skin and Irish eyes.

"Do you mean to say I'm a sneak?" he cried again, his eyes flashing.

"Oh, we're so deuced honourable, ain't we?" jeered Syme.

"Do you dare to say I'm not honourable?"

"There, be quiet, Pat—no need for hysteric yet. Just listen to reason now. I say again, the girl doesn't care for him. Secretan is a sort of Quixote, worshipping the ground she treads on, and so bores her, as a matter of course. It doesn't do to worship a woman, as he'll discover soon enough. I haven't a
doubt but that she'll jilt him; and as you're too squeamish to step in, some one else will collar the stakes, that's all.”

“I'll never do a shabby trick by old Simon; he has been a good friend to me.”

“And a good enemy to me, Terence, so that I have a fine, round, full-grown spite against him. He has called me names, and hindered my achievement of a practice by his d—d interference with other people's concerns, and one of these days I’ll be even with him. 'Hard words break no bones,' they say; but they are apt to stop the daily bread of a general practitioner for all that—and hunger sharpens a man's spite, let me tell you.”

“Well, don't abuse old Simon in my presence, for it hurts my feelings, Jack. Now I want to ask you about this trout-licence question; for it seems that I ought to have a ticket, though, as the water is Secretan's, I
have been fishing it for the last fortnight without one."

"Go to Ezekiel Doidge, at No. 50, High Street. He's secretary of the Angling Association, as of everything else, and will order you about to your heart's content."

"All right; and I must be making a start now, old chap." Clancy's face was cloudless again already. He stood at the open window, the afternoon sun blazing upon his sunny face. "Faith, 'tis a bright world, Jack Syme. Look at the children just free from school, racing along by the stream! Look at the dancing water, and the jolly red cattle, and summer haze brooding over the woods yonder, and the grand moors rolling away above them! Ah! I'd like to settle down here and never see a big town again."

In reply to this outburst Syme only grunted, pulling at his dirty clay pipe—

"I'd rather live in a slum with a decent income than——"
“Silence, you Goth! That’s John Bull all over, with the shop and the till always pulling at his heart-strings. There, good-bye, Jack.”

Jack Syme stood looking after his friend with a puzzled frown.

“Can’t make him out,” he muttered; “don’t half know him yet. He’s a deuced taking fellow, fascinating as a pretty woman; but—but what? I don’t know what. I think he’ll have an eye on the Tredethlyn girls from this date. I think he’ll fail with Kate, and then? Then will come the rub; we shall see whether Miss Nell’s eyelashes, backed by two thousand a year and her other fascinations, will modify his sense of honour, cool the ardour of his conscience somewhat. Maybe not; yet, in Secretan’s place, I wouldn’t trust mine own familiar friend too absolutely. Clancy’s sympathies are too quick, his emotions too facile and tender, his complexion too good. And he has the
additional, perhaps crowning, attraction of poverty—a virtue of itself sufficient to stir the pulse of any romantic young woman. Yes, in Secretan's place, I certainly would have a plainer, or a richer, or a harder-hearted friend about me just now; say, for choice, some eligible landed proprietor, with bad teeth and gooseberry eyes; and, to make assurance doubly sure, one that was silent, diffident, humble-minded, and the possessor of every virtue under heaven!"
CHAPTER II.

ABOUT a couple of miles outside the town of Chillington lay a compact little property called Moor Gates, in the heart of which was a small country mansion, the home of the Rev. Polwhele Tredethlyn and his two daughters.

Mr. Tredethlyn was a large, good-natured, picturesquely idle man, who, having once occupied the post of vicar to a country parish containing quite five hundred souls, had ever since conceived of himself as an overworked man enjoying a well-earned repose; one who had some claim to a quiet haven after patiently undergoing his allotted
quota of "the weariness, the fever, and the fret." Rumour declared that in his youth he had been an athlete, which made it the more advisable for him to exert himself gently in late middle-age; perhaps, indeed, that youthful athleticism had produced, by way of natural reaction, the quietude which now distinguished the comfortable squire-parson. It is certain that he resented nothing more than the imputation of laziness, that the occasional passages of temper which took place between him and his elder daughter, Kate, resulted from a suspected disposition on her part to regard her father as a thought too idle, and a shade too much given to pathetic analysis of his dyspeptic symptoms. In truth Mr. Tredethlyn was no idler. He would preach sometimes for the vicar, when pressed at bland moments, and always preached well; he would speak from the platform of the town hall at public meetings without any
pressing at all, almost; and a Chillington audience was never better pleased than when confronted by his genial countenance.

The quiet haven of Moor Gates had become a possibility when Mr. Tredethlyn took to himself a wife of ample means; nor had the moorland anchorage become less easeful when the wife in due course paid the debt of nature, leaving him with Kate—whose temper was occasionally a little trying—to remind him of herself, and so give spice to existence, and Nell to make much of, revere, and spoil him.

The little place suited both Kate and himself admirably, having its own little shady drive watched over by a miniature lodge on the Monks Damerel road, its miniature park well timbered and secluded, its garden embraced on three sides by the grand desolation of the moor. It fitted in with his liking for peace and quiet, as well as, by its smallness, with a certain weakness
he had for living well within his income; while Kate's chief vanity was ministered to by its air of refined propriety. Ostentation she cared nothing for, her pride finding outlets of a superior nature; but an environment at once dignified, decorous, and of a countified complexion she considered her natural due.

Kate's boudoir, for instance, was a model of what she considered correct—a small chamber full of comfort, and ease, and colour—the newest art-colour as a matter of course. Even the light of day was too common for admittance in its crude state, but had first to be tempered and refined by draperies of pallid green or ochreous yellow. Her father might do as he pleased with his study, but this boudoir was a sacred spot, the abode of half tones, fashionable magazines, and little feminine elegancies. Sitting here, with the smooth lawn flowing up to the windows, and a distant view of the
Chilling vale peeping through the laurels, Kate could realize to the full the breadth that separated her from the good folks of Chillington—supposing, that is, any artificial aid were necessary to a perception already sufficiently clear in this direction.

In this dainty little chamber Kate Tredethlyn happened to be standing about the time when she and her sister were being talked over in Jack Syme's odorous parlour. She was watching through the French windows for the pony-carriage to pass round from the stables; but her looks suggested that she had something more than the ponies and trap upon her mind. She was a tall, black-browed, handsome girl, and just at present finely posed from an artistic point of view, with a warm light from the south-west flowing round her; but the dark brows were drawn together and the eyes looked sullen. It was clear that Miss Tredethlyn was not in her best mood; and evidently
the glimpses she occasionally caught of her father lounging about just out of tongue-shot, and looking remarkably cool and comfortable, had a far from soothing effect upon her. She would have been glad to get him within range for a moment, just to go into one or two household questions with him. And he was quite aware of her wish. Indeed, the large parson took a boyish delight in tantalizing Kate now and then, and thus revenging himself for past punishing moments. By choosing the laurelled path for his contemplative cigar just now, he was able to add the pleasure of retaliation to that of smoking good tobacco; and, after a busy two hours spent in superintending a gardener from the depths of a cane chair, he was thoroughly in tune for a double enjoyment.

In point of fact, Kate's frame of mind was akin to that in which young men mutter bad words and reject feminine sympathy;
for she had a task before her, and one none the less unpleasant from the consciousness that it ought to have been faced before, and must now be hustled through without due dignity and decorum. "I have had two whole months to do it in," she was reflecting, with vicious tugs at her left glove, "and now there's just one half-hour left. Nell, I'm going to have it out with you, and I would rather—rather go through a tea-party with every bore in the neighbourhood in full talk."

Before that left glove was quite moulded on, and her mind half braced up to the necessary pitch, Kate's sister entered the room.

Nell looked charming, as a matter of course, in a crisp white summer gown and a big hat bent about into cunning curves and subtle hollows. She was built on a slighter, more delicate scale than her sister, but her colouring was as sumptuous as Kate's, her style gentler and more winning.
Altogether Nell Tredethlyn seemed a person to love and to swear by, rather than to quarrel with.

"Yet I must quarrel with her," mused Kate; "and I will—so there's an end of it." Aloud she said sharply, "Late again, Nell, and a lover waiting! What will your tender conscience say, my dear, if you're five seconds late on the platform?"

"But we shan't be late, so my conscience can have a holiday."

"Holiday? It has just had two months' holiday, and so will be in fine working order, I fear."

This was Kate's first shot—a trial of the range, as it were. Nell had been separated from Simon Secretan, her betrothed, for just two months, and the remark was made in a pointed way which left no doubt as to Kate's meaning.

Nell looked astonished and pained. A peculiar constraint fell upon them both.
Kate stared hard at a photograph, not seeing it in the least, but preparing for another shot. Before she could fire it, however, the pony-carriage passed the window, and she promptly led the way across the hall, somewhat relieved at the thought of a practical task—for those smart black-browns of hers wanted some driving—as likely to steady her nerves.

As soon as they were seated, the black-browns bounded off with a jerk and whirled them down the short drive in a trice. But Kate pulled them up, kicking and plunging, at the lodge gate, and said hastily—

"By-the-by, Nell, before I drive you to meet the train, I bargain to drop you at the station door. You must face Sir Galahad alone, for I'm in the wrong mood for him to-day. If this arrangement won't suit you, I'll jump out and you can take Charles."

"Very well; you can drop me at the door." Nell's curtness matched her sister's.
Then Kate gave both ponies a vicious lash, thus ensuring some hard work for her hands and wrists, set her teeth, and prepared for a plunge.

"Nell, I’ve got something on my mind."

"What is it?"

"A sister—a most tiresome, Quixotic, infatuated, extravagantly conscientious little creature called Nell."

"What is the matter with Nell?"

Both girls were somewhat flushed; both spoke and looked straight to the front, their glances declining to meet.

"I’ll tell you what is the matter with you, Nell—a swelled conscience. You have a tendency that way. Your conscience takes up too much room in your general constitution, and has a bad habit of getting further swollen through inflammation."

"I don’t understand you in the least."

"Nell, will you admit that you’ve been happier these last eight weeks, while we’ve
been away, than during the whole past twelve months?"

"No; I'll admit nothing of the sort."

"You've betrayed all the outward symptoms of good spirits, at any rate; but perhaps that was only by way of mask? Perhaps your depression this morning was another mask? If so, this subtle hypocrisy is a new phase in you—very new to me, I assure you. Luckily, however, Sir Galahad's tolerably blind."

"You can abuse me if you like, Kate; but I won't stand a word against him!"

This spurt of anger from her sister gave Kate just the lift she needed, rousing her own temper to the pitch requisite for plain speaking.

"I'm just as conscious of his merits as you, Nell; he's a sort of Sir Galahad, Don Quixote, and Romney Leigh—all rolled into one; and it is just because he is so, and that you're much the same thing, though in petti-
coats, that I want to separate you. He worship you, and you like him. It is an old story, and in most cases the arrangement suits admirably. In yours it never can. You are a brace of fanatics. You can't give him all he asks—which is your whole heart, soul, and mind, and so you're unhappy. What will be your state when you've married him, I should like to know; when your shortcomings stare you in the face every day and all day, instead of now and then? If he only were fanatical, well and good; but you are both tarred with the same brush. Now, listen, this is the beginning, middle, and end of the whole matter. You've got it in you to care for a man a great deal, yet have vainly tried for a whole year to care for him a little!"

Kate glanced round at her sister for a moment. There were angry tears starting from Nell's eyes.

"Yes, I could cry too," she continued
sternly. "I could whimper like a child, if that were any good. A splendid match! Who could realize that more fully than a cynical respecter of persons like me? As Lady Secretan you might lead the county; you would roll in riches, your life would be all cushions and brocade. And yet, with all my appreciation of these things, with all my abominable worldliness, I want you to cry off! My sentiments are those of a Barnes Newcome, yet I want you to back out of the best match in the county! Now, doesn't it occur to you that there must be some powerful instinct at work thus to metamorphose a worldling into a sentimentalist? I'll go further; I'll admit that Simon is not only a good parti, but a fine fellow as well, which just serves to make matters worse, gives emphasis to your lukewarmness, despoils you of all excuse. Nell, you're simply heaping up wretchedness for him and for yourself!"

After this outpouring—a most unusual
incident in the relations between the sisters—Kate turned off her course up a narrow by-lane, saying grimly, "Neither of us is fit to be seen on the public highway just now; and there are just ten minutes left to have it out in, Nell."

"I tell you flatly that I will never give up Simon."

"Ah! I never hoped you would. I've done my duty, at any rate, and my mind's relieved."

"If I make a clean breast, tell you the whole truth once for all, will you promise me never to allude to this again?"

"My dear, will a prisoner promise to pick oakum no more, if once set free?"

"Then I'll admit what I have never yet done to a human soul, and never will again—that my love for Simon is but lukewarm, and that I hate myself for it."

Katie raised her eyebrows mockingly, but said nothing.
"But, Kate, I do care for him, and my best hope is that in time I shall care for him as he deserves. It is impossible, impossible," cried Nell, her cheeks flaming, "that any girl should go on accepting the love of a man like that without learning to return it! My heart is set upon returning it; it is a point of honour with me, the thing I long for most in the world, that I pray for before all other things."

"Well, thank goodness I have none of your intensity to trouble me," said Kate, with a distracted sigh; "for, hampered with such a temperament as yours, I should have pined away and died at ten years old! I really don't know what's to be done with you! How would it be to send you out as a governess? I fancy twelve months of a situation in a genteel Low-Church family might rationalize you a bit. I wonder the doctors don't invent a drug for the cure of over-conscientiousness—the cancer that eats
into the heart of our sex, and, what is worse still, makes us spoil the men so abominably!"

"I'm sorry I confessed at all, now," cried Nell, angrily.

"Don't mention it, my dear; I shall manage to bear up against it pretty well—especially as I've known the whole story for months; moreover, it interests me to see how deep into lunacy a woman will wade, if given rope enough. Proceed, my dear child, I'm all ears."

"I've quite done, Kate."

"Finished already?—and I had composed myself to listen for half an hour. . . . I'm obliged to joke, little Nell, because I'm so vexed, do you see? And I should like to abuse Simon, because it's so aggravating to have to admire him. I do admire him, though I try not; but I wish he had never seen you. I wish he had given his heart to some good, wholesome, selfish creature like myself, who'd have put it in her pocket
along with his last present, and have thought no more about either. However, though you're a tiresome child, I'll forgive you this time. Kiss me, little Nell. There, if I don't turn the ponies at once, I shall be getting sentimental."

Back again into the main road, then forward with a rush and a clatter. People who saw the pony-carriage coming, and thought to get a look at the handsome Miss Tredethlyns, hardly caught a glimpse for the dust and the speed as they whirled past. Round the corner by the smithy rushed the black-browns, and down the steep hill into the yard at a pace calculated to astonish even those accustomed to Miss Tredethlyn's driving. The ponies smoked again as they were pulled up at the station door, just behind Sir Galahad's dog-cart.
CHAPTER III.

In a few minutes' time the down express had arrived and departed, and Nell was strolling gently down the hill beside her tall lover. The latter having got rid of his servant and trap, and all his luggage, save a few articles that were now bulging out his pockets, they had before them two clear hours—for which Sir Galahad had stipulated in his last letter—before going back to prosaic existence and the society of rational persons.

There was no need for Nell to ask whither they were bound, for she was tolerably certain that Simon would follow
a favourite route. He would first take her over the town bridge and down the river bank by the vicarage garden, because he must needs have a look at the little town in order to feel thoroughly at home again; and afterwards into his own woods of Hollacomb, because they were redolent of sweet association with herself.

As they passed down the steep hill, with the little town spread out before them, the rush of Chilling Water greeted Secretan with the voice of an old friend. The Chilling vale, with its farmsteads and town, had in fact an appeal for him, not only from sentimental and æsthetic points of view, but as being a kind of bank in which he had invested a good deal of money, much of his heart, and most of the energy of his young manhood. For Simon Secretan was a practical philanthropist; at least a philanthropist in fact, and a practical one in intention. No living person had given more
thought and pains to the welfare of the little hive of human beings towards which he was bending his steps; and, as for the issue of his good endeavours, something might come of them some day or other; for already there might have been found in the place, one or two persons capable of praising Mr. Secretan, and two or three more who only described him as a tiresome fanatic in deference to public opinion, or to please a neighbour.

At the bottom of the hill was Chillington bridge, fringed as usual with a double rank of summertide loungers, who happened to be looking rather brisk and expectant just now, since the arrival of the down express was quite the event of the day. At this hour an interesting review was to be looked for—the march past of two hotel omnibuses, and perhaps a dozen passengers from London. Torpid old gaffers who had leaned over the parapet all day, allowing
the flowing water to do their thinking for them, would perk up at this time and look almost like conversation, though seldom getting to the length of actual words.

Most of the loungers touched their hats as Nell and Secretan passed, and a gentle trickle of remarks followed upon their passage: nothing very eulogistic or the reverse, however, for Chillington bridge viewed things largely and calmly, with an aristocratic distaste for any display of enthusiasm. Moreover, Secretan was too eccentric, too earnestly bent upon the amelioration of his fellow man, to be thought quite satisfactory; while too rich and powerful to be altogether found wanting.

Upon leaving the bridge the pair of lovers passed down the right bank of the stream, their path lying between the gleam and laughter of Chilling Water on the one side, and the grey old wall of the vicarage garden on the other.
Simon Secretan sauntered along with that easy, massive kind of lounge which comes natural to large men. His fine head was thrown back a little, his face full of light and gladness. He had the look not only of a man with whom all things are well, but of one whose fancy will insist upon painting things even better than they are; the look of an enthusiast, a dreamer, an idealist—one of those who enjoy intensely and suffer keenly. A man incapable of half-measures or half-loves; to possess whom for a friend is to have a brother, a generous partisan blind to your faults; one whose good opinion you must needs live up to, knowing what a shock must ensue upon any discovery of your shortcomings. Most of all, too, a partisan of the feeble and unlucky, a "general gauntlet gatherer for the weak against the strong;" a man to love well, and satisfy if you can, or else to avoid altogether for fear of crashing falls.
Nell, too, felt happy and at ease as she walked beside her big lover. Her late excitement had naturally produced a reaction akin to contentment, for the baring of the heart is so often the heart's easing, the expression of an urgent desire its half fulfilment. A smooth sense of peace possessed her; already she cared more than she had imagined for Simon; the deeper love was coming, surely coming. She felt a repose in his presence that must needs be a precursor of that better state of things. The sense of exaltation and rest combined was strong upon her this evening; the large nature of the man seemed a concrete tangible thing upon which she could lean. Nell's contentment was visible in her eyes, in the rich flush on her cheek; she would change places with no living person at this moment.

They emerged presently upon the open meadows below the town, and Simon halted
for a good look at the little place before they moved on again. Then they sauntered along the meadow path, where are seats beside the stream, shadowed by tall elms, and nooks much sought after by young folks of the town, who like to round off a day's work with an evening's courting.

As they traversed this idyllic path, now in the green shade of the elms, now in the full dazzle of the sloping sun, Jack Syme looked from his parlour window, and recognized the twain. He did so with a half-smile of contempt, corrected by a lurking gleam of sentimental appreciation. He was human, if not poetical, and the lovers made a comely picture; but his grudge, kept simmering by recent discussion, rather clouded his æsthetic perception.

"They are going down stream, and will probably chance upon Terence," he muttered. "If so, I should like to be present at the introduction."
They soon passed out of sight, however, and Jack Syme fell to thinking of other things. Though embittered by a lively grudge against Secretan, he was not a man of deep-seated malignity; and could he have foreseen how prodigious a crop of mischief would spring from the mere handful of seed he had sown in Clancy’s mind this afternoon, he would have sunk his grudge under the deepest pool of Chilling Water rather than have given it so dangerous an airing.

Unconscious of being a target for any man’s gaze, hostile or other, Simon passed on down the river, a sunlit heart within, and a world of sunlit haze around him, while the presence of his fair sweetheart dazzled his thoughts as the slant sun-rays his eyes.

Once fairly out of sight of the town, he helped her down the steep river-bank, and selected a moss-grown boulder beside a still pool as her throne.

“Here you must rest awhile, my queen,”
he said, with a low luxurious laugh, “for certain odds and ends are burning holes in the pockets of your faithful subject, and crying out to be handled.”

He laughed again as he emptied pocket after pocket upon a flat rock.

Nell flushed uneasily as she watched the growing heap of boxes and miniature parcels, and the pouring out of their contents brought a shadow on her face.

Simon, it appeared, had been treasuring up every trifling want of hers. Not a casually mentioned wish, forgotten months ago by herself, had escaped him; he must have been listening to her very thoughts for this twelve month past.

His lavishness touched Nell nearly, but the evidence of his unresting thought for her smote upon her with a sense of pain. Every gift he had brought was like a witness against her, an exposition of the insignificance of her affection as compared with his.
She felt too much crushed to thank him properly, and had too little natural hypocrisy to feign even so much pleasure as propriety demanded. But he noticed nothing amiss. A sensitive, thin-skinned man in all other relations, he was stone-blind to any shortcoming in this—with the blindness of intense natural loyalty aggravated by an imaginative temperament.

This blindness always deepened Nell's uneasiness. She felt caged and cramped by this intense belief in her, even to the point of hysterical longing to trumpet forth her unworthiness—to thrust it upon him with harsh words and looks.

"Let us move on again, Simon; I am rather restless to-day."

The remark was abrupt, the tone anything but kind, but he showed no surprise. "Very well, dear, let us stroll on. What do you say to following the other bank, and taking the woodland path towards Hollacomb?"
"But, Simon, there's no bridge nearer than——"

"A ready-made walking bridge on the spot, sweetheart!" He held out his arms. When she hung back, he laughed at her for nervousness. "Never fear, little Nell; I shan't drop you; you're a deal too precious."

In a moment his right arm was round her slender figure, and she found herself lifted off the ground—a featherweight in the strong man's hands.

He strode down to the shallow end of the pool with slow, lingering steps, then took an oblique course through the water, as though to lengthen the journey if possible. Half-way across he stopped, held hard by his passion, and whispered huskily—

"I love you—I love you! I couldn't have passed another day without seeing you, my darling, my beloved!"

The bright Chilling laughed as he kissed
her lips; the air seemed richer for the love-vows of a deep-hearted man, the carol of the lark more thrilling. Then he uttered a dazed sigh as he waded out of the stream, and placed her gently upon her feet among the ferns. He had found the air of paradise intoxicating.

While he returned for the odds and ends left upon the other bank, Nell stood waist-deep among the brake fern, with pulses throbbing fiercely. All her innocent self-satisfaction had gone; she was humbled, heart-sick, and amazed. It seemed that all her worst fears about herself, which had given way beneath her own ardour when setting forth her wishes to Kate, and been subsequently dispersed by the glow and excitement of first meeting Simon, had surged back like a cowardly mob reinforced.

For the first time, after a twelvemonth of continuous effort and passive endurance, she found herself in open mutiny against her
lover, possessed by a sudden overwhelming repulsion.

"I hate him!" she muttered. "I've been a hypocrite to pretend the contrary; and he's too stupid to see through me! What right has a man to be so blind, so utterly infatuated? He ought to see my torture, he ought—— O God, forgive me! What a mean, cold, selfish creature I am!"

Reaction had come again by the time Simon was back with her; the rebound of a generous nature was strong in her as she placed her arm in his, crying——

"Dear old Simon, you care too much for me!"

Yet very soon her depression returned. She blew hot and cold—had a change of mood for every turn in the path; pitied herself one moment, hated herself the next; now was amazed at her own long endurance of an intolerable yoke, now puzzled at her own fickleness and coldness. The struggle
was the harder for its strangeness, this wavering, up-and-down mood being quite foreign to her usual habit of mind. Hitherto all had been smooth between them. Living within so short a distance, seeing him almost every day, she had grown thoroughly used to Simon; but now the habit of passive endurance had lapsed, and it seemed that her yoke would never sit easily again.
CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE, they drew near the border of Hollacomb Great Wood, into whose green embrace rushed the Chilling stream, with flash and flicker of foam by way of brief coquettish farewell to the sun. Nell drooped somewhat at the prospect of entering this woodland solitude; she would have liked better to walk with her lover along the most open and frequented stretch to be found on the Queen's highway.

Just inside the wood, however, a stroke of unexpected good fortune befell her; she caught sight of two familiar figures at the turn of the path.
"Look! Surely those two are Mary Pe-thick and Mr. Doidge?" She spoke briskly, doubtless with a sense of relief at the coming interruption. The strain was removed; they had returned abruptly to the cheerful domain of King Commonplace.

"Simon, I think Mary is unhappy with that man; I do believe he beats her! He's such a black, sour-looking fellow, that I've always been afraid to speak to him."

"Oh, he's a good fellow," quoth Simon, in his large careless way. He hates me like poison, and always shows it, which is a good sign. There's no sneaking hypocrisy about Ezekiel Doidge; I like a man whose face reflects his heart in that way. Perhaps he's a bit savage and out of tune with the world because of Mary's coldness. His sweetheart doesn't care for him, they say."

"Do you blame her for not caring enough?"

"No, I blame him. He ought to have
TERENCE CLANCY.

discovered that long ago; a man ought to have eyes in his head."

"Those two look as though they had been quarrelling, Simon?"

"Poor Ezekiel!"

"Poor Mary! I think. You don't seem to feel at all for her."

But they were now drawing too near the other couple for further discussion of their concerns.

Mary Pethick, who turned to greet the newcomers as soon as their steps became audible, was a young woman who monopolized a good deal of Chillingdon's gossip about this time. She was the daughter and heiress of a retired tradesman; much spoiled by the ladies of the neighbourhood on account of her musical talents, and by the young farmers and tradesmen on account of a certain prettiness and coquetry—a combination which, with the general run of men, is apt to avail more than real beauty.
Indeed, many flirtations with all sorts of men, had earned for Mary the character of being a shallow, fickle creature, more likely to get into mischief than ever to prove good for much. But Nell Tredethlyn chose to think there was good stuff in the girl. True, Mary was a thought too fond of pleasure; but, was it surprising that, living as she did, in the seclusion of Hollacombe Farm, with only a deaf old father for company, the girl should be driven to extract every possible scrap of fun from the Chillington gatherings? And as for her inability to appreciate the wealthy miller and landowner, Mr. Doidge, to whom she had probably engaged herself without enough consideration, why—some people might be inclined to sympathize with her on that score.

Mary received Miss Tredethlyn with a blush and an awkward bow, but Nell's frank hand went out to her immediately.
"I am so glad to see you, Mary. Have you been singing much lately? Tell me of any new songs you have."

Nell had felt especially drawn towards the girl lately, their mutual attraction doubtless arising from similarity of situation. They were, so to speak, fellow-sufferers; each of them too much beloved, each bearing the burden according to her light—though the lights were wide asunder in respect of power and quality.

There was something of comedy in their obvious relief now. Mary, who had previously been sulking for a full half-hour, prattled cheerfully, as soon as her first shyness wore off; Nell's returning brightness was like sun after gloom.

But these blind men perceived not the comedy. Doidge stood thrashing the lady-fern, and looking savagely from his sweetheart to Mr. Secretan, as though seeking for some sign between them.
He would gladly have picked a quarrel with Secretan, being jealous of him in more relations than one. For, before Secretan’s arrival in these parts, Ezekiel Doidge had been a little king in Chillington. He had organized and domineered over every club and society of which the little place boasted, until his self-conceit became insupportable; and, the county gentlemen always holding aloof from the town and its affairs, his position appeared to be impregnable.

But no sooner did Simon Secretan come into the neighbourhood, than he plunged eagerly, full of philanthropy and other dangerous fads, into the life and doings of Chillington.

First he handed over all the water on the Hollacombe estate, which he had inherited from his mother, to the Angling Association; thus making Doidge’s gift of half a mile of stream seem trifling. Then he levelled a flat-topped spur of the moor with a view
to making a cricket ground for the townsfolk; then thrust his fingers into benefit societies, plans for the old age insurance of labourers, and other matters having no concern with what people chose to consider his proper business. In short, this amateur philanthropist had in various ways contrived to mortally wound Doidge's self-love. And now that foolish miller, with the eager fatuity of an intense man nipped by jealousy, had come to look upon Mr. Secretan as a possible entangler of his sweetheart's affections.

It must be confessed that Mary always took pleasure in giving colour to this delusion. To extol the handsome Mr. Secretan was a simple, sure—and, as she thought, perfectly harmless—way of punishing a lover who not seldom required the rod. She was able thus, moreover, to render innocuous the spurs of jealousy which would have been dangerous if directed against other people—against one
man in particular, if the truth must be told. In brief, Mary was a coquettish woman, with her natural failings emphasized by a foolish engagement; and had lately been playing with edged tools, whose wounding capabilities she was yet to discover.

Miss Tredethlyn and Mary seemed loth to part this afternoon. The interest of their gossip showed no signs of abatement, for the sufficient reason that each vied with the other in eager putting forward of fresh topics. Judging by their present aspect, it seemed likely that nightfall would find them still talking.

Doidge regarded them with frowning impatience, his every third glance wandering rival-wards. But Simon Secretan, among whose fads the study of astronomy held a high place, was drawing a geometrical diagram on the sandy path, and seemed lost in calculation. Yet this might have been a mere cunning feint of abstraction, and
poor Ezekiel, in his present condition, could suck jealousy out of a stone.

After a few minutes the mathematician emerged from his problem, and the talk ceased abruptly. Some one was evidently approaching, the sound of whose passage through the bushes was inaudible to Doidge on account of his proximity to the rush of the stream.

This some one was a fisherman, who came scrambling up from the rocky bed of the river, carolling at the top of his voice—

"O dolce Napoli
O suol beato,
Ove sorridere
Volle il creato."

The voice was a clear delicate tenor; its owner, Terence Clancy by name, was pouring his heart out in sheer exuberance of health and spirits. Terence was a cunning angler, and had been doing smart things with the Chilling trout. The hot, bright weather, so
unfavourable to the fisherman, had been a challenge to him, and the pink-spotted beauties now lining his creel made a veritable triumph under the circumstances.

Upon catching sight of the group on the pathway he flushed warmly, coming to a dead stop.

"Who the devil are you, with your woman's skin and red hair?" muttered Ezekiel Doidge.

The question was answered immediately; for Secretan called out with a laugh at his friend's embarrassment—

"Hallo, Terence! Well met, old fellow. I'm delighted to see you."

Then Clancy came forward, stamping the water from his dripping waders.

"You've often heard me speak of my friend Terence Clancy, Nell? Well, now at last I can introduce him to you in the flesh."

The simple ceremony would have pleased
Jack Syme, had he been present; for even though Terence was not quite at his best this afternoon, Nell quickly discovered him to be charming. His slight awkwardness seemed to accord so well with his modest looks and sentiments. He had a gentle, deprecating way with women, as though he were not half good enough for them; and his sunny smile had a curious attraction of its own. Nell thought she had never yet met a man quite so frank and pleasing. There was something fine, too; something quite removed from the commonplace about big Simon's friendship for this man. He stood with one hand on Terence's shoulder, speaking to him with the kind of protecting solicitude he might have shown towards a delicate woman. In a moment, as it seemed, they were all three talking together as though Clancy and Miss Tredethelyn had been old friends, Terence exhibiting his fish, and modestly describing how he had
blundered over and lost the inevitable "biggest of the day."

Meanwhile Mary Pethick had stepped aside to pluck some ferns, and was stooping over them, red and pale by turns, the fronds shaking in the hand that held them.

Ezekiel, too much out of temper to join her, was watching the others. He presently called out rudely—

"Hi! you, sir; have you been fishing without a ticket?"

"Mr. Clancy is my friend," said Secretan, tranquilly, without troubling to look round.

"But this is Association water, though it runs through your land, and the Association, represented by myself, knows nothing of your private friends, Mr. Secretan."

Doidge advanced a few steps, quite cheered at the prospect of a controversy with his rival; but Terence hastily interposed, pulling a fishing ticket from his fly-book.
"Are you the secretary, Mr. Doidge? Well, I got this at your office this afternoon." He spoke with a disarming smile, which had a curious melting effect upon Doidge.

"All right, sir; no offence. But as I dismissed both keepers for idleness t'other day, I'm obliged to do the watching myself just now. Somehow I like this young fellow," he added to himself; "he's quite different from that d—d stuck-up swell of a Secretan!"

One sharp, sudden, half-scared, glance Clancy shot at the secretary as he turned away; but no one noticed it, unless it were Mary Pethick, who had looked up from her fern-gathering upon hearing Ezekiel's voice. Unfortunately—most unfortunately for every one of the five persons who had thus met together by chance—the quick-eyed jealousy which, if directed aright, might have availed much, was wasting itself in busy search for
a mare’s-nest. Doidge was missing an opportunity from pure misdirection of vision; straining his eyes to find a cloud in a speckless sky, and so disregarding the danger-signal held up in his path.

Soon afterwards Mary bade a rather hasty farewell to Miss Tredethlyn, and departed up-stream with her lover. Terence also remarked that he must be going, and marched off through the woods with a view to making a bee-line for Monks Damerel Hall.
CHAPTER V.

THE combe in which were situated the hall and hamlet of Monks Damerel was a long narrow valley trending in a westerly direction, its steep sides widening out at the mouth as if to embrace and make much of the westering sun. It was a lateral branch of the main Chilling vale; full of the mystery and seclusion of the moor, but having a dainty green beauty of its own unknown to the bare brown wilderness around it. A stream, which marks the axial line of every hollow in these parts, flashed through the oak-coppiced grounds of the old hall, curving crisply.
a mile or so below, round the half-dozen cottages of the hamlet. No main road crossed the quiet combe; but only the stony moorland track, connecting it with Chillington on the north, and then following the brook down to its junction with the river at Bickington bridge. It was a place for a scholar’s thoughts to mellow in, a suitable haven of rest, as Sir Hamo Secretan thought, during the twilight time that follows upon a deep grief.

Sir Hamo came from a distant county, a district which he never intended to re-visit; which, indeed, had become so hateful to him that he had sold his old family estate for half its value and departed, shaking the dust from his feet. For there, in one fell week, he had lost, through an epidemic of diphtheria which had ravaged the neighbouring villages, his eldest son, two fair daughters, and his beloved wife.

Never a strong man, this blow had had
the effect of confirming his natural weakness and idiosyncrasy. From being a bookish man with occasional bursts of action, he became a downright bookworm, and for some years was hardly ever seen outside his study. At length, however, he roused himself from his lethargy, so far as to feel once more the promptings of land hunger; and as his remaining son, Simon, had inherited from Lady Secretan the manor of Hollacomb, near Chillington, Sir Hamo's eyes were turned in that direction. Thus, when the Monks Damerel property, which half surrounded Hollacomb, chanced to come into the market, it occurred to both father and son that the opportunity might be taken advantage of. True, the neighbourhood was thick sown with memories of the wife whom Sir Hamo had wooed and won by Chilling Water, yet might not these memories suffice to lend a delicate aroma of old happiness to the neighbourhood?
A single visit to the hall, the ancient home of an ancient race, settled the question. For here, surely, was the very place of refuge for which the old scholar's faded heart craved. Here was a grey old mansion, rising, massive and melancholy, from its balustraded terrace; in its front a wide fore court, and battlemented gate-house led up to by a broad avenue of sycamores with counter-avenues of beeches. And, best of all, this old-world picture was set in a most fitting frame—an old formal garden of the sixteenth century, with bowling alleys, and green galleries, and mighty hedges of clipped yew; and "knots" of rosemary, hyssop, and thyme. The preservation of this garden in its ancient state had always been a point of honour with the Bampfylde family; the vulgarizing touch of the modern landscape gardener had been rigidly excluded; and so the old place was a complete, harmonious whole, a gem set by a delicate
artist, well worthy of its place upon the bosom of nature.

After viewing the hall which he had not seen for five and twenty years, and pacing through the length and breadth of that ancient garden, Sir Hamo drew a deep breath and vowed that a worn-out old fellow could find no better resting-place anywhere within this naughty world. No need for any further pressure from his son; his mind was already made up, and in a couple of months' time he and his son had taken possession of Monks Damerel.

Now, soon after their settlement, ironical fate decreed that old Sir Hamo, already a man of considerable wealth, and wanting even such moderate ambition as makes the salt of existence, should become the indifferent possessor of great riches.

It came about in this way. Upon the southward fringe of the property there was a presumably worthless old tin-mine, which
had broken the purse, and afterwards the heart, of the last owner. Sir Hamo took no interest in this mine; he had purchased the land for the sake of sentiment, not minerals, and hardly knew whether or not he should continue working the ore. But fortune, with her usual aptitude for snubbing the devout worshipper and rewarding the callous passer-by, insisted upon providing him with an agent of exceptional ability, who first caused the mine to pay moderately, and presently discovered a new lode which not only multiplied the output by ten, but afterwards led the way to the opening up of other lodes still more valuable. Thus Sir Hamo, the eremitic scholar, became the possessor of such prodigious wealth as neither he nor any one else quite knew the amount of.

The sensation produced in the neighbourhood by these discoveries was tinged with a certain cynical melancholy. There was poor old Squire Bampfylde, in whose family
the hall had been for so many generations, dead of a broken heart; and hardly was he cold in his grave, when the ungrateful soil of his forefathers opened its mouth to pour forth gold upon an indifferent stranger. And how much good would it do now? Would this old bookworm of a baronet keep a pack of hounds, fill his house with eligible bachelors, give great entertainments such as swell the tills of honest Chillington tradesmen or in any other way study the well-being of his fellow-man?

In fact, Sir Hamo never made a single bid for popularity, but quickly settled into his musty groove; entertaining his county neighbours as seldom as decency permitted, and never giving Little Chillington a thought. Yet a course of consistent selfishness is not necessarily unpopular; being at least incompatible with neighbourly interference—the one thing your genuine Briton does hate with depth and vehemence. At any rate,
this neighbourhood, upon which Sir Hamo never bestowed a thought, bore no particular grudge against him; and in truth was not a little proud of his immense wealth and fabulous erudition.

His son Simon, however, was right royally hated by a good many worthy people, chiefly by reason of his benevolent fads and whimsies. If Sir Hamo thought too little of Chillington, his son thought a deal too much. He seemed oppressed by his heirship to a noble fortune, to feel with Romney Leigh—

"Who thought to take the world upon his back,  
To carry it o'er a chasm of social ill."

Simon had a dozen tiresome theories about decent housing of the poor, honest trading, and other unpalatable matters. He was welcome enough to build a free library and mechanics' institute out of his father's money; nor was there any particular harm in his fancy for giving up all the trouting water
on his own estate of Hollacombe to the Angling Association; but when it came to building a row of new cottages by the river and letting them to idle fellows at a nominal rent—why, critics thought it high time for tongue-sharpening.

As patron of the living, too, Simon Secretan contrived to give much offence. For on the death of the old vicar, a good easy man and true Chillingtonian—who did nothing, and died universally respected—he must needs put in Frank Nelson, an energetic young Cambridge man as exacting and tiresome as himself. Between the two Chillington grew harassed and irritable, like an over-drugged patient; and soon found itself deprived of that repose which it valued even more than mild lambing seasons and sunny harvests. Let this big pushing young gentleman stick to his observatory on the moor; let him stare himself blind with his telescopes if he pleased, and leave honest folk
alone; in short, "Let un lave off harassing o' we, and us won't interfere wi' he!" Such were the universal sentiments of Chillington bar-parlours of a Saturday night.

Sir Hamo, as we have seen, concerned himself little about so much of the world as lay outside the walls of his study; yet for one person he would sacrifice even his beloved seclusion—to wit, his intended daughter-in-law. For Nell Tredethlyn he had a romantic affection—a species of adoration curious and picturesque as a study. Nell made a link between himself and his son—a link much needed, for this sentimental, but narrow-hearted, old gentleman had never quite forgiven Simon for surviving the beloved elder brother. "If only Hamo had been spared to me!" was the father's constant cry.

He even grudged Simon his taste for mathematics and natural science. When had dear Hamo ever been guilty of this
vulgar modern craving for hard facts and dull figures? Ah! but Hamo was a chip of the old block; while Simon might have been any man's son.

By becoming engaged to Nell Tredethlyn, however, Simon made a definite step in his father's affections. As beautiful Nell's lover he acquired a new importance and interest; in a word, father and son at length possessed a fad in common—and true fanatics were they both in its pursuit.

On all occasions when Nell was expected as a guest, it was Sir Hamo's custom to perturb and exasperate his whole household for days beforehand. One of his whims was to have none but female servants about the place; another was a rooted disbelief in their capacities in any direction whatsoever. He distrusted women entirely, yet hated the race of flunkeys too cordially to admit one single specimen under his roof. Thus it became necessary, whenever visitors were
expected, to harry the housekeeper, and through her to induce a current of hysteria throughout the establishment. If the Tredethlyns were invited, Sir Hamo would have draughts on the brain, and seemed to have a settled belief in a universal conspiracy against the life of Nell; who, having seldom known a day’s illness, was often distressed by elaborate precautions and schemes tending to asphyxiation.

Now it chanced, about a week after Simon’s return from town, that Terence Clancy had an opportunity of observing these phenomena peculiar to Monks Damerel Hall; for Nell, with her father and sister, was invited to dinner. From the moment of their acceptance he noticed that the atmosphere of the house became charged with electricity. Nor was he himself untouched by the prevailing epidemic of excitement.

In truth, Terence was tingling with anti-
icipation of a kind too keen to be quite pleasurable. The last week had been to him a whirl of sensations, which acted upon him like repeated draughts of strong wine. He and Simon had half lived at Moor Gates; and of that best week in his life Terence felt this evening to be the crown and finish.

After this the curtain must fall upon the too-charming pastoral piece, and the stage-lights must be put out. No more play-acting for one whose life was to be a round of commonplace drudgery. His pleasant holiday must come to an end; he must settle down to real work; quit the fine old hall, with its charming idleness and refinement, for some such dingy, evil-smelling little place as Jack Syme's surgery.

It was hard, bitterly hard. Had Nature endowed him with wit, and social talent, and keenest love for all things fine and beautiful, to enable him to fill the rôle of driven,
harassed, hand-to-mouth general practitioner? Yet, what chance had he in a world where cash means happiness? What hope of improvement in his lot? The Secretans meant well, but Simon's intention of working up a practice for his friend was simply of a piece with his other Utopian dreams.

During this visit to the hall Terence had become better acquainted with this visionary from whose kind offices he had hoped so much. Why, Simon's schemes, he had found, were the standing jokes of the neighbourhood; and this visit would prove no better than a disastrous waste of time, an aggravation of the drudgery to which he was returning so soon. Why had Simon asked him here at all, only to torture him with a glimpse of paradise? His friend had shown him a most cruel kindness in this matter. Would that he had never left town, had never seen Chillington, never entered the hall, never been taken to Moor
Gates,—most of all, would that he had never met Nell Tredethlyn!

For Miss Nell seemed to be the culminating note in his indictment of Providence, the last straw of his burden. Terence was intensely impressionable. Nell’s beauty and sweetness of manner had affected him almost magically in that short interview by the river, and again in the many subsequent meetings at her own home. He had tried hard to be attracted by Kate, but she only awed him, while Nell intoxicated him. He was conscious of an insane desire to see Nell again, jeer how he would at his own fatuity. She belonged to his friend—was bought with Simon’s money, as he reflected bitterly. Was ever a wish denied to wealth, or granted to poverty? Secretan had but to hold up his finger, and this girl with her glorious beauty was thrust into his arms. He had everything, *everything*—all the beauty and poetry of life, the glow, the
freedom, the love— Well, for this one evening, for this last evening in paradise, he, Terence, was going to be happy. For this once he would sun himself at Nell’s eyes. There could be no danger in that. Mayn’t a man drink one draught of happiness before retiring to a desert? Nor could honour be called in question. Simon had, in fact, more than once expressed a desire for his betrothed and his friend to see a great deal of one another. He wished them to be real friends, had even stipulated that Terence should take Nell into dinner tonight. He was throwing them together of his own free will. Now, Terence could not afford to disoblige this powerful friend. Moreover, he felt himself as fit to be trusted upon the point of honour as any man living; Syme might have spared his sneers on this head. Terence would like Nell to be pleased with him, to feel as a friend towards him—no more. What critic could dare to find
fault with so humble a desire? But at present there was no critic at hand either to praise or blame; for by capturing all hearts Terence had secured a chorus of eulogy from all around him; while as for his conscience, that was not always proof against his own eloquence, indeed often needed backing up by outside opinion. An unbiased person, however, with a perfect knowledge of the workings of Terence's mind at this juncture, might have offered some useful platitudes by way of corrective to the arguments furnished by himself in his own favour.
CHAPTER VI.

When contemplating an entertainment, on however small a scale, Sir Hamo was nearly always compelled to seek the assistance and support of his lady cousin, Mrs. French-Chichester. Without some such extraneous aid his battalion of petticoats used to get out of hand as well as hysterical.

To-day was to be no exception to the rule; and about two o'clock, when the fume and fret of harassed females had converted the hall into a residence about as desirable as the interior of a volcano, the lady arrived in due course; whereupon peace and order
ensued immediately, the almost tragic strain upon a score of nervous systems was relieved as if by magic.

Terence Clancy was the first to greet the welcome visitor.

"Well, Mr. Clancy," she said, shaking hands with him warmly—for during the last five or six weeks Mrs. French-Chichester had, for certain reasons of her own, "taken up" and befriend the young Irishman to their mutual satisfaction—"what is the condition of your atmosphere over here to-day? Much hysteria about? Any of the maids in fainting fits? Well, cousin"—this to Sir Hamo, who had just drifted into the drawing-room, looking absent and irritable—"have you been enjoying yourself, harrying the womenkind? I think you're really fortunate in having a medical man in the house; some of those poor maids are sure to need treatment before the day's out."

"Your spirits are wonderful, Kathleen,"
said the old gentleman, with a sigh and a courteous bend of his silver head. "We are expecting Nell and some others to dinner, and so——"

"Yes, yes, I know; and the sky will fall unless everything's perfect, won't it?"

"And so I thought you would be so very good as to come over——"

"Of course. I'm only too glad to leave the dismal shades of Hollacombe for a few hours. Why don't you send Simon over to see me oftener?"

"Oh, Simon's no good!" retorted the old man querulously. "He's always immersed in his star-gazing or his absurd philanthropic schemes. He is away now on some mysterious errand in Chillington, getting astronomical drawings copied, or haply designs for a new infant school, or home for decayed gentlewomen. I do assure you that he cares far more about determining the shape of Jupiter's fourth satellite, whether
round or elongated, than considering any such trifle as the happiness of those about him. But you know his fads as well as I, Kathleen."

"Why, of course I do! Think of Nell's fate when she marries your son, cousin; she'll have to alternate the rôle of observatory-assistant with that of matron to the last new hospital!"

Mrs. French-Chichester rang a merry peal of laughter. Her mirth brimmed with good nature, but had a sediment of malice, as the quick-eared Terence had often noticed.

"Well, I hope," continued Sir Hamo, with a sigh and a furtive edging away towards one of the doors, "that as I have no son to help me, you will kindly take charge of everything, Kathleen; and I'm sure our always-kind Mr. Clancy will act as your aide-de-camp."

"Yes; I'll see to everything. You are free from this moment, cousin. You may retire
at once to your library and your ancient manuscripts, and never give the household another thought. Mr. Clancy will help me, and we'll do all that's necessary, even to hermetically sealing the dining-room windows for the sake of poor delicate Nell."

Sir Hamo retired obediently. His step was listless and weary as he passed from the room, his grand head was bent low; the stoop of his shoulders seemed to have grown more marked even since his cousin's last visit. His noble presence and air of refined melancholy always made his withdrawal from a room seem to Terence like the closing of a sad poem.

For a few moments after the door closed they were silent; then Mrs. French-Chichester, as if drawn on by Terence's sympathetic looks, began to speak her thought aloud.

"Why doesn't he care more for Simon?" she muttered reflectively.
Terence made no attempt to answer the question. He had failed as yet to quite comprehend this lady and her relations with Sir Hamo and Simon. She was at present Simon’s tenant, having taken Hollacomb Manor for a term of years, and, as Terence had gathered from others, was the only one of his relatives of whom Sir Hamo had taken any account of late years.

But though he had not yet fathomed Mrs. French-Chichester, her very friendly treatment of himself had strongly biased him in her favour. Here was he, a penniless, struggling young doctor, picked out of the crowd and made much of by the most notable and popular great lady in the neighbourhood. How could he do other than like and admire her? She seemed in her good-natured way to disparage Simon somewhat unnecessarily, especially in speaking of him to his father; but these small shafts might be no more than the aftermath
of an old quarrel, of which Terence had heard rumours.

This quarrel had been brought about quite naturally. Mrs. French-Chichester was the widow of a distinguished general, and after the rapid life and movement of popular foreign stations, often found the stagnation of an English country district a weariness difficult to support. To correct this she liked playing Lady Bountiful to the neighbourhood, especially to young people, more especially to good-looking young people, most of all to young people in love. She had a keen eye for the symptoms of a budding passion, and was perhaps a thought too fond of furthering the intrigues of young lovers.

It was in this connection that Simon, with his singular capacity for putting his foot into it, had come into collision with Cousin Kathleen.

There was a certain romantic affair, in the
course of which a young squire of the neighbour­hood broke an engagement of long standing, his breach of faith being aided and abetted by the adroit mistress of Hollacomb Manor. This was a noble opportunity for Simon the gauntlet-gatherer, and he did not let it slip. He first exchanged some hard words with the squire, and, having thus generated sufficient excitement to attack even a lady relative, drove straight to Hollacomb, and gave Cousin Kathleen such a rating as might be forgiven and forgotten in the course of ten years or so—by an exceptionally generous person.

Terence was acquainted with this bare outline of an affair which had made some stir at the time, and sometimes wondered how Simon and his cousin had come to be on such good terms again. In spite of an occasional shaft or two, it seemed that the widow must possess a considerable fund of magnanimity.
He shot a puzzled glance at her now as she stood reflecting. She was a tall woman, with glossy black hair sprinkled with grey, a sallow complexion, and light-grey eyes, keen and alert. Though she seemed buried in thought, he caught a return glance directed at himself, and they both smiled to pass it off.

"You haven't answered my question yet," she said, "so I must do so myself. Why is there so little accord between Sir Hamo and Simon? I believe it is because at bottom they are too much alike; because the same morbid vein runs through father and son. Both run to extremes; neither is in touch with ordinary human nature; neither knows anything of the world that goes on around him. Indeed, Simon's blind optimism is phenomenal in a man of his age."

"Perhaps you are right," Terence responded musingly; "their likeness makes their discord. I was thinking only yester-
day that Miss Nell Tredethlyn makes the only real link between Sir Hamo and his son."

"Ah! were you—were you thinking so?"

Her words came out quick and crisp as jets of steam. Terence looked more puzzled than before. She began at once to explain her eagerness.

"It interests me to find your thought running in the same groove as mine, Mr. Clancy—I had almost said 'Terence,' for I'm afraid that is what I call you behind your back."

It was a little intoxicating for Terence to have so important a personage almost coaxing him by her deprecating tone.

"It would be an honour and a pleasure to hear you call me 'Terence' to my face," he said warmly.

"Well, why shouldn't I? I'm old enough to be your mother, and we've known each other nearly two months, haven't we, Terence?"
“Certainly. And during that time you have shown me such unvarying kindness as I cannot thank you for half enough.”

“Tut, tut, my dear boy, you don't know what a pleasure it is to me to meet a clever young Irishman in this dull corner of Saxon-edom. Why, half the girls about here are in love with you already, I believe!”

Terence laughed musically; he was always modest enough to make it a pleasure to flatter him.

“But, to return to your friend Simon a moment, Terence—do you know, I am very uneasy about him? It is true that a breach with his betrothed might cause a quarrel with his father, but that would be healed in course of time. What I fear more is the step from betrothal to marriage, and the subsequent awakening—you understand me?""

He understood readily enough, and listened for more with a curious sense of trouble mixed with exultation.
"You see, Terence, I speak to you frankly and without affectation, as being, like myself, Simon's friend and well-wisher; and, further, as one possessed with far too much power of intuition to be blind to what passes before your eyes. You know as well as I that this engagement is a one-sided affair. Indeed, for my part, I'm heartily sorry for the young people. Nell doesn't care for him—never will; never could—and has found it out too late. Simon is perfectly blind to this, and will be until marriage opens his eyes, and then—ruat coelum! The plain truth is that these amiable young innocents are bound on a journey which must land them in wretchedness. The girl is torturing herself now, but what will be her state when actually married to Simon? She'll hate him as well as herself; that will be the end of it. You know my nickname for him—'Lord Timon!' Well, he's Timon in the reckless generous stage now—he'll be Simon the Cynic, then! No
half-measures with him, I know well; he'll plunge from his present extreme of blind happiness into that of pure desolation."

Terence felt that there was much truth in all this—and tried to feel that there was no malice under it. Mrs. French-Chichester seemed to be speaking as a kindly woman impelled to unusual confidence by sheer warmth of feeling; but—but, as she said, Terence had a keen faculty of intuition. She concluded in a lighter, somewhat apologetic tone—

"However, I ought not to take advantage of your friendship for Simon by troubling you with these matters which are disturbing me. Let us now ring for Mrs. Henley, the housekeeper, and set to work in earnest."

Mrs. French-Chichester and her aide-de-camp then entered upon their duties with zest, for the bustle and movement of such preparations were grateful to the excited mood into which both had fallen. The
lively widow took a special pride in her capacity for manipulating the female flock at the hall, and getting them to work harmoniously; and her velvety smoothing of Mrs. Henley, while denuding that jealous woman of all her powers and privileges, was a miracle of adroitness. Even in utilizing Terence she displayed talent, assigning to him the task of cozening the head gardener. A wealth of flowers flowed in upon her in consequence; for to the frank boldness of a man Terence added the pleasing cajolery of a woman. It was the same with gardeners, stablemen, maids; even with the crabbed Mrs. Henley herself—neither man nor woman could resist Terence, since he attacked each with arts learned from the other.

The hours flew. In no time, as it seemed, Terence found himself in the drawing-room with Mrs. French-Chichester, listening for the rumble of arriving wheels. Sir Hamo had been extracted from his library but a
few minutes ago. Simon had not yet arrived from his mysterious visit to the town. They had a pleasant little ten minutes together.

Terence was full of open admiration for his companion, and she really deserved it. Her somewhat sallow complexion looked well by gaslight, her pale eyes gleamed brightly; her figure was full of stately grace; her toilette such a masterpiece as long purse, long pains, and talent amounting almost to genius, can produce when in combination. She looked what she aspired to be—the queen of the neighbourhood.

And to a man of his age there was a peculiar fascination about the protecting, even flattering, attitude she assumed towards him. She tapped him with her fan, encouraged his admiration, fastened in his flower coquettishly, and by a dozen little attentions led him to understand that he was a handsome young fellow, well deserving a high place in her regard. Even his genuine modesty was not
proof against such bewildering treatment; The clever widow fairly turned his head.

She sprinkled the air all round him with delicate flattery, which he drank in together with the flower-scents of the room; and her radiant costume flattered his eye as her words his ear. Without any apparent leading of Terence she tuned his mind to the pitch of exaltation in which the touch of every new thought strikes out a melody, and mere fact is lost in the harmonious clang of many hopes. The mere prose of life was melting into verse, and as the verse flowed she wedded it to music. He seemed, as it were, to have climbed the social ladder at a single stride. Ambitions which a week ago had been ridiculous were now becoming rational and even praiseworthy. And she was careful not to carry him too far or to let any wish of her own stand forth to mar the impression she had created; she seemed merely a good-natured friend, anxious to
encourage him and make him conscious of his gifts.

After this exciting process she steadied him a little by a laughing description of some of the people he was about to meet.

"You know Mr. Nelson, the vicar, I think? He has a touch of good old Simon's lunacy, but fortunately is not rich enough to carry it to the same lengths. His wife has a nursery full of children—with ideas to correspond. We shan't get much fun out of them. Mr. Tredethlyn is worth meeting—when not dyspeptic. Of course you've met him, though, as well as the girls? As for the latter, they at least will provide us with a spice of comedy. On the one side we shall have Nell trying to care for Simon; on the other Kate trying not to care for his friend Julius Rush. Captain Rush is a dragoon guardsman, and heir to a fine property called Bickington Park. But un-
fortunately the place was purchased with the base coin of trade. Old Mr. Rush, now Squire Rush of Bickington, occupied many profitable years in measuring the waists and legs of noble lords and others in a respectable shop at the West End. And you know Kate’s weakness. Had the tailor’s son possessed the wealth of a Midas and the intellect of a Newton, she must have snubbed him. She does it well, too. You’ll see tonight how she can make him writhe; for he’s a proud man, and admires her against his will. I fancy she has a little weakness that way herself, from the pains she takes to be rude to him. Odd thing, isn’t it, that one sister should be cooing at the man she doesn’t care for, while the other is, so to say, clawing the man she does? Ah, that’s the sound of wheels, Terence—the curtain’s about to rise!”

The different groups which made up the small party entered soon afterwards in quick
succession, and Terence found himself greeted cordially by almost every one.

The good-natured, unctuous Mr. Tredethlyn drew near to him with especial friendliness.

"You see, we none of us look upon you as a stranger, Mr. Clancy, having heard so much about you from your friend and eulogizer, Simon. We are all hoping that you will really settle down in the neighbourhood. I assure you Chillington is quite prepared to receive you with open arms," and so on, and so on.

Why did every soul he met thus insist upon puffing and praising him? By what gift or faculty did he thus attract every one who crossed his path? He made no special effort to please; hearts seemed to be won by a civil remark or a brace of conventional smiles. But whatsoever the gift might be it would be wasted, he presumed; for the vice of his poverty, once
clearly exposed, must soon kill his popularity.

Terence's glance, straying past the bulky form of Mr. Tredethlyn, presently hit upon the corner where Simon, who had but just entered, was talking to Nell. She seemed distraite. Her long lashes were lowered; or was this a deferential meekness induced by the presence of her lord and master? She looked more ravishing than ever to-night, Terence thought, with her dark face set off by white and gold draperies, her little hands toying with her big fan. And tall Simon stood worshipping her; doubtless gloating over his property. They would be married ere long, Terence supposed. He felt a stirring of something like hatred for this man upon whom Fortune so lavished her gifts.

The simple announcement of dinner roused Terence like a bugle-call to action; the best moment of the twenty-four hours was at hand.
When the party paired off Nell was to belong to him, to be his very own during that brief passage to the dining-room. Ah, the moment had come at last! The rustle of dresses and murmur of talk was ebbing from the room, Nell's small hand was upon his arm, her flower-face looking up to him.

"You seem depressed this evening?" she whispered kindly, as they crossed the polished hall.

"I wonder was Adam cheerful when the time came for him to leave paradise?" he answered recklessly.

Her innocence gave a keen edge to his temptation. She was country-bred, unsophisticated, without the usual quick perception of her sex in one direction. Her unconsciousness of his admiration made it so dangerously safe. He felt that he could look and talk as he pleased, that no thought of anything beyond simple friendship would come into her mind.
In truth all Terence's surroundings combined to inflame him to-night. Peasant-born, and reared in narrow circumstances, he was yet intensely alive to æsthetic impressions. The mellow old dining-room, with its oak panelling and fine pictures, appealed to him keenly; those delicate Claudes and sensuous Correggios, collected by Sir Hamo and his forefathers, spoke to Clancy as to no one else in the room. None of these people, his social superiors, had his innate perception of grand art; almost all of them would have preferred a flashy modern landscape or sickly sweet piece of homely genre, or haply some drama of puppy dogs and milk-cans. The very flowers on the table had a special appeal for him; the silks and satins, the bright eyes and white shoulders around him, the refined, melancholy features of Sir Hamo as he sat at the head of his guests, made up what was to Terence a picture at once rare and beau-
tiful. And beside him, her face full of sympathy and readiness to be pleased, sat Nell Tredethelyn.

Never had Terence been so witty and brilliant as this evening. A far duller man might have made a success if borne along, as he now was, by such a tide of favouring conditions. His courage had been stirred, his self-esteem set a-glowing, by a skilled hand; cordial greetings had made his nerves tingle pleasantly; he was thoroughly conscious of being among friends, yet sufficiently a stranger to retain the first gloss of interest and piquant newness which familiarity so quickly makes rusty; and the sharpest of all spurs to effort was pricking him—the desire to warm one special heart and dazzle one special pair of eyes.

Mrs. French-Chichester fell into his mood delightfully; even when she never spoke he was conscious that she was supporting him. With a difficult or unappreciative audience
Terence would have been dull and silent, but among these kind friends his talk flowed and gleamed like the Chilling stream. He brimmed over with Irish anecdote and drollery, while Simon, delighted with his friend's success, kept urging him to fresh efforts. Mrs. French-Chichester was radiant. Captain Rush, excited perhaps by Kate's presence, contributed a wit of his own—dry, veined with sarcasm, making a useful corrective to Clancy's wealth of words. Not for many a long day had the quiet hall entertained so mirthful a party. Even Sir Hamo's habitual depression melted under the warmth of their genial mood; and as for that lover of all good things—whether in the nature of food, wine, or gossip—Mr. Tredethlyn, his large comely face was ruddy and shining with laughter. "We can't let the man go at any price," he said to his friend the vicar; "he's better than any liver tonic. Stay in Chillington he
shall, if I have to buy him a practice myself!"

Terence laid himself out to be charming, and scored at every sentence, making every point in his natural equipment tell. Yet he never seemed to monopolize the conversation, but rather by some magic of tact and sympathy made every one else seem as witty and eloquent as himself.

Mrs. French-Chichester watched this triumphal progress with a serene sense of having at length secured a protégé really worthy of her artistic manipulation. Almost anything might be made of this man. Assisted by a clever woman, he had a career before him; handled delicately by a kind friend, there was a vista of possibilities stretching along his path, and at the end of it, perhaps, a harvest of satisfaction for the kind friend to reap. Truly he was a more important person in her sight than he had yet imagined.
"Well," cried the lively widow, throwing herself upon a sofa as soon as the ladies had filed into the drawing-room, "what do you all think of 'my pretty boy?' Isn't he superb? Haven't I often been crying out for an Irishman to put a little life into us vegetables down here? Really, I'm ashamed at the amount of laughter I have perpetrated this evening! Wait till he has secured a practice, and you'll see what a clean sweep he'll make of all our medical fogeys down here. He'll ruin them, send them all to the workhouse in a body; your stolid Saxon will never stand against him! He's just charming now, isn't he, Nell dear?"

"He is indeed; so full of spirit and life, and yet so gentle and modest, and—. But I never can describe people."

"Kate, what have you to say about him?"

"He's pleasing, no doubt; but I'm always a cynic, you know."
"Tut, child; don't be talking of cynicism at three and twenty! What have you to say against my 'pretty boy'?"

"Nothing."

But Kate spoke with just sufficient luke-warmness to evoke fresh enthusiasm from the rest of the party. Terence's ears should have burned indeed under the chorus of eulogy poured forth in the drawing-room.

"I know they'll keep him there for ever so long," concluded Mrs. French-Chichester, "for, to speak candidly, men are just walking bundles of selfishness. Remember that when you think of matrimony, by-the-by. Kate, they're all alike, so choose the richest! I know precisely what is going on in the dining-room at this moment: they're pouring out the wine and making him pour out the wit, and they won't give us a look at him again this hour. Suppose we all stroll out on the terrace; we might catch a little fun through the open window? Or perhaps
some of you pretty girls might tempt the men away from their wine? Nell dear, you put on a shawl, or we shall have Simon and his father rushing out upon us, each with an ulster! Or, stay! Go without one, and so we may perhaps break up the party. I'll stand the blame."

The manœuvre was completely successful. The group of ladies, relieved against the mist-laden vale, and bathed in the warm light of the after-glow, made a picture not to be resisted. Peering through the window, Clancy espied them, and stopped in the middle of a sentence; Captain Rush, following the other's glance, pulled moodily at his moustache, and had nothing more to say. Sir Hamo, catching sight of Nell's bare shoulders, walked to the window to upbraid her imprudence. In three minutes the dining-room was empty.

The ladies moved innocently away without looking behind them; the men streamed out
upon the terrace, the dragoon guardsman bringing up the rear. He was engaged in the struggle between pride and inclination that Kate's presence always induced. Why should he go near a woman who despised him? Contempt was the one thing in the world that he found insupportable, and none but Miss Tredethlyn had the temerity to curve a contumelious lip at him. As a Cambridge man, a sportsman, a good fellow (also a rich fellow), he had been well enough received by his regiment. He had distinguished himself in one of our small wars, and more—far more—was a polo-player of some note. How dared she despise him?

The square-jawed, somewhat grim soldier, always showed a stoical front, but the fact remained that Kate could torture him almost at will—and her will was generally equal to the task. His inferior origin was a sore which no success in life could ever quite
heal, but the woman he admired was apt to make it burn and sting as no one else could do. Certain darts of hers were sticking in the place now as he came sauntering carelessly behind the other black coats, revolving how best to show his indifference. Downright avoidance seemed the simplest plan, and was also the hardest.

Unfortunately, too, Kate happened to be detached from the others, and to glance at him just as his resolution was formed. Perhaps she was in a softened mood, perhaps content with the snubbing she had already administered this evening; at any rate, the glance was delivered. He deviated a little from his course, so as to avoid her; but—but the twilight was bewitching, and Kate looked passing handsome in this light. Not so beautiful as Nell; her face a shade too long and narrow, her bearing many shades too proud. But, unfortunately, this dragoon had a weakness for tall haughty women. He might give
her one chance, say just three words, for example; and if she chose to treat him as the gravel under her feet, this should be his last attempt at civility; she should be ignored henceforth.

Captain Rush spoke the words, and was received with a smile—not an effusive one, but sufficient, so few and far between were his encouragements, to upset good resolutions in a trice.

They fell in behind the others, but their conversation dragged. It is difficult to be agreeable when clogged by anxious pride; and neither would so far relax as to make a genuine effort. Presently they halted at the top of some steps, whence a path led down through the shrubberies to the brook side.

"What would I give to take her down there?" thought the soldier.

"Why doesn't he offer to take me?" thought Kate.
"Why don't you two go and have a look at the stream? I shall be sending Nell and Clancy after you, directly."

It was the voice of Simon, the ever-ready helper of lame dogs over stiles.

The pair stepped down immediately, without a word, each vowing secretly that Simon was a good friend.

Very different was Clancy's plan of attack from the dragoon's. He felt reckless of appearances. It was his last evening, his last chance; and in a forlorn hope audacity is the only policy. He walked boldly up to Nell, and easily succeeded in detaching her from the others; indeed, Nell fell in readily enough with his plans, for the simple reason that she had a message from Simon to deliver, and might not have so good an opportunity for some time.

Before they had gone many yards, Simon joined them.

"I won't give her up," muttered Terence.
"I won't throw away my last chance to please any man living!"

"Terence, old boy, suppose you take charge of Miss Tredethlyn for a quarter of an hour? I am going to have a weed with the vicar."

"The man's nothing short of a fool," thought Terence; "but, if he will thrust me into temptation, let him take the consequences!"

Nell seemed pleased with the arrangement, exchanging, however, a significant glance with her betrothed, which puzzled Terence not a little, and damped his ardour somewhat.

"Shall we stroll down to the brook, Mr. Clancy?" she asked, with her ravishing smile; and straightway glamour and hope wrapped themselves round him again.

For Terence it was an enchanted garden through which they walked. For once in his life he was not out in the cold, for once
circumstances were kind to him, allowing the melody of hope to rise and swell unchecked. He knew that his best chance lay in Nell's sheer inability to suspect; that his cue was to arouse her sympathy, appeal to her kindly feeling. With her, pity would be more nearly akin to love than with most people.

He began to speak to her of himself, of his poverty and struggles, and very sweet was the sympathy with which she listened. It was impossible to avoid deceiving her a little. That was not his fault, the deceit being a part of man's natural tendency towards the picturesque fallacy. Without intentional misleading on Terence's part people had rushed to a picturesque conclusion concerning him—to wit that he was a poor gentleman, a small landed proprietor, compelled to undertake a professional career by his unwillingness to oppress poor tenants. He had never proclaimed this in so many words; it had been evolved from the neighbourhood's inner
consciousness—at least in a large degree. In plain truth, Terence Clancy was the son of a small farmer in County Cork, whose only tenants were a few cottiers; and who perhaps received about £20 a year from this source—when rents happened to be paid. As the clever one of the family, Terence had, by dint of much scraping and the assistance of friends, been sent to an English public school, and being now fairly launched on the world, was expected to make his fortune, and become the mainstay of half a dozen little brothers and sisters.

Upon reaching the brookside, they rambled along it until close upon the bridge over which ran the lane to Monks Damerel village. There they halted upon a patch of green-sward, and Nell turned to him with a sparkle of kindly triumph in her eyes—

"I ought to feel mean for letting you run on so, Mr. Clancy; but I couldn't resist the temptation of giving you a great surprise."
I have a curious piece of news for you, in the shape of a message from Simon. You mustn't disappoint him! Oh, you mustn't! He would feel it so deeply if you refused. You know how anxious he has been to have you settled near him? He has been working to that end without saying a word to any one but me, and now has actually achieved it this very afternoon; if you will but consent to let him do you that much service. You must consent, for he has handed over to me the privilege of persuading you, and I've promised to succeed. Will you say 'Yes' before I tell you?"

"I shall find it hard enough to say 'No' to anything you ask."

"I'm not so sure about that; men are so dreadfully proud—at least, I know Simon is, though he scoffs at the notion. Well, this secret of his is—he didn't half like telling it you himself, and now I'm quite nervous about it—the fact is, Simon has been talking
business with old Dr. Rose lately, and this evening they came to—to some arrangement, by which Dr. Rose is to retire, and you, Mr. Clancy, are to take his practice. Oh, pray don't refuse, or I shall put it down to my clumsiness and want of delicacy!"

Terence almost gasped with astonishment. Dr. Rose's was the practice of the neighbourhood, worth more than Terence had hoped to be earning after twenty years' work. In a flash he saw that, were this news true, his fortune was made. With his personality, and gift of pleasing, he could, having a fine ready-built practice to work upon, rise to almost any height of success. But this business was worth a large sum of money; could Simon be so preposterously generous even for a friend? No need to ask the question; it answered itself. Very rightly had his cousin called him "Timon."

"Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my friends
And ne'er be weary."
So said Timon of Athens, and Timon of Chillington might have claimed the sentiment as his own. His friend’s romantic generosity brought quick responsive throbs from Terence. How mean and shabby and poor he felt; he who had but now been trying to undo the happiness of his benefactor. What mean pitiful sophistry had he been guilty of up to this moment! After this, he felt he would rather die than injure Simon. Never another thought of Nell would he harbour beyond what a brother might. It was a marvel, this gift of Simon’s; an act of unparalleled generosity. Simon had been borrowing money lately, as Terence knew; his father being tired of supplying the wherewithal to carry out his philanthropic schemes. He had been borrowing the money which was to give his friend this start in life. Terence rushed to the conclusion, and knew it to be a true one.

As he stood looking amazedly at Nell, his
face on fire, his thoughts in a whirl, there was a sound of wheels, and a rough pony-cart came down the lane from Monks Damerel. Its driver was John Syme, who had been visiting a farmer's wife on the moor a mile or two beyond the village. There was light enough for him to see the pair by the stream, even to catch Clancy's eye as he passed. Syme was whirled quickly by, but his look of exulting comprehension remained with Terence.

"You're wrong, though, Jack Syme, quite wrong," he muttered, turning to Nell as she began to speak again.

"I do hope you're not going to refuse," she said uneasily. "The disappointment would be so painful to Simon."

Terence smiled at the comical attitude of these Arcadians. Refuse? Why in the name of common sense should he refuse? He would not even affect hesitation. All that was honest and generous in him re-
responded to this proposed gift of Simon's, and he let her see it. He called him a benefactor, poured out words that came hot from his heart, and brought tears to Nell's tender eyes.

"I must see the old fellow alone to-night," he concluded, "though I can never tell him half that I feel. Speak to him first, I beseech you. Tell him that I have it in me to cry like a woman—that I shall do so if I attempt to say much."

"Yes, I'll tell him," said Nell, with a glad laugh.

"Will ye shake hands with me now?" he cried, in his eager boyish way; "will ye shake hands and conclude the matter so? There, 'tis a bargain."

Terence laughed too, though his eyes were moist.

"Ah, how like Simon is the whole transaction!"

Her praise gave Terence a pang of jealousy, but he stifled it manfully.
"None of that, Terence Clancy!" quoth he to himself; "if ye don't play fair and stand by old Simon now, I'll never trust ye again, you scamp!"

As Nell and Clancy walked back along the brookside, still glowing with the wonderful secret, they were met by Captain Rush and Miss Tredethlyn.

Rush did not appear to have advanced his suit much this evening. He wore the caustic smile of one who has just discharged a sarcasm and seen it hit the mark. He looked a trifle reckless too, as though he had been fighting battles with his tall companion to the detriment of his own interests, as was actually the case. In fact any intercourse between these two was apt to end in combat, in the clash of her arrogance with his pride.

Kate, with a view perhaps to support herself against any weak leaning towards this son of a tailor, would always contrive to
throw down an apple of discord, in the shape of some question of exclusiveness or caste prejudice, and so to sting him into retorting with the sentiments of a socialist agitator. Thus their dialogue usually bristled with sarcasm and polite bitterness, and the foolish pair usually parted in bad temper and mutual enmity.

This time, however, circumstances gave them an opportunity of unwonted accord, for when they came suddenly upon Nell and Clancy, looking excited and happy, evidently on the best of terms, a look of uneasiness was exchanged between Captain Rush and his companion. Without a word they joined themselves on to the other pair, Kate quietly taking possession of Clancy, Rush opening an immediate conversation with Nell regarding the beauty of the evening. And so they all four returned to the terrace together.

When Nell whispered the brief tale of her
success, Simon exulted as boyishly as Terence himself. He had not the least conception that he had just accomplished a rather clever stroke, and cried "Check!" to two dangerous enemies.
CHAPTER VII.

The next few weeks were a time of pause for Terence and his group of friends—a quiet period during which nothing seemed to happen, though the seeds of future events may have been in process of sowing by unwitting hands.

Terence himself was for the most part occupied in driving about the neighbourhood with Dr. Rose, learning the weaknesses and weak sides of the various county families whose ailments made the bulk of the practice. It soon became evident that the well-lined mantle of the old doctor would descend upon Terence intact and sit without a crease. He
took in the goodwill of the business, as it were, at every pore, and made a new group of friends every time he stepped down from Dr. Rose's dog-cart. It was a unique experience for Terence—this feeling that his future was assured, that grinding anxiety was no more, the hair-shirt of poverty stripped off; that in a week or two he would be a man of substance, possessing a decent house, and a stable with a couple of horses. In truth, Simon was not one to do anything by halves, least of all any extravagance on behalf of a friend: the agreement to be signed shortly would put Terence in possession not only of a flourishing business, but the well-furnished house, large garden, and other appurtenances of the old doctor's establishment on the hill. For Dr. Rose was himself about to remove from the town, to emerge from the pupal stage of country practitioner into the full-winged imago, a country gentleman.
A quiet period and, at least for the first week or two, a cheery one for that sunny fellow, Terence Clancy. He blossomed afresh under the warm influence of prosperity, was so full of brightness and life as to be more sought after than ever. Take Mr. Tredethlyn, for instance. The large, good-natured parson suffered a good deal from an ailment seldom called by its right name—idleness. Good feeding and old port were insufficiently corrected by a drive into Chillington once a day and a couple of hours spent at the little club afterwards. His liver demanded something more than carriage-exercise and a friendly gossip, with perhaps an hour's pottering in the garden. He suffered much about this time from headache and depression, and Terence prescribed for him. In fact, with a good liver tonic, and his own genial society, Terence wrought a miraculous cure. The universe brightened once more for Mr. Tredethlyn, the bitter pessimism
that comes of dyspepsia was lightened, the charm of easy-lounging began once more to assert itself. His gratitude was deep and large; for, rare as that virtue may be, the successful treatment of a man's liver will evoke it if he possess a human heart at all.

Thus, with every intention of avoiding the Tredethlyns, Terence constantly found himself on the road to Moor Gates. If there were no invitation from Mr. Tredethlyn, Simon himself would be sure to drive his friend over on some excuse or other.

Simon was in Chillington almost every day just now, looking after some allotment gardens, for which he had given a piece of land below the town, or putting finishing touches to the White House, as Terence's new home on the hill was named. Towards evening he would usually look in upon his friend, and often enough would carry him off to Moor Gates there and then. It was such an easy way of giving pleasure to every one,
himself included. The whole household welcomed Terence. Even Kate, who would never fully subscribe to the general admiration of the young doctor, admitted that she found pleasure in his company. As for Mr. Tredethlyn, he was musical as well as liverish, and always crying out at his daughters for not giving him music enough. Nell sang fairly well, but never reached above mediocrity, while Kate was no performer at all. Now, Clancy wanted style and finish, but his ear was perfect, the quality of his tenor excellent; and Nell's contralto made a good second. Mr. Tredethlyn liked their duets, and made them practise together a good deal.

"You're up at Moor Gates three or four times a week, ain't you, Terence?" asked Syme one afternoon, as they sat smoking together.

The question seemed innocent enough, springing naturally from what had gone
before, yet Terence winced uneasily. He disliked talking about the Tredethlyns with Syme, as the latter was well aware.

"Well, yes; I'm up there pretty often. Mr. Tredethlyn has taken a sort of fancy to me, and they are all very kind and hospitable."

"And Secretan is constantly driving you up there?"

"Simon's a friendly old fellow, certainly."

Terence shifted his feet uneasily; a slight flush of annoyance was detected by his companion, who sat mumbling the stem of his pipe between his thick lips. No need for further question. Syme was satisfied that he had gauged Terence's mental condition to a nicety. He was of opinion that his impressionable friend was every day falling more deeply in love with Nell, while bent upon never admitting it to himself for fear of his own conscience; that he meant to let things slide on as they would, and thus, in the event
of a climax, to find himself in a position to answer the accusing voice with, "I meant nothing; I never dreamed of such a thing. It is fate!"

Though himself of much coarser grain, Syme was able to probe and analyze the complex nature of Terence Clancy, and knew precisely why he was now sometimes depressed amidst all his elation; knew that the differing elements in his character were engaged in constant drawn battles at this period; that one hour generosity and rectitude had the mastery, and the next slippery self-love. This psychological study was an interesting pastime for Syme, the more so because he fully expected the issue of the struggle to jump with his own desires.

"Ah, here is Secretan!" he exclaimed, after a pause, pointing to Simon, who had just driven past and was pulling up at Clancy's lodgings. "Come to fetch brother Terence as usual, I suppose?"
"I shan't go with him; I'm going out fishing."

There was an ugly frown on Terence's face.

"Why, man alive, you'll disappoint them all up at Moor Gates!"

Syme was careful not to mention names, but could not resist playing with his friend.

"I shan't go," Clancy reiterated angrily. "I shall send your boy across to say I've gone out fishing and shan't be back for hours."

"Poor Simon! Has he offended his affectionate friend?"

"Curse your sneering ways, Jack Syme. I hate to hear you speak of Simon!"

"Lucky man! What a friend he has! A man who can't bear a word against him—loves him like a brother, and will stand by him through thick and thin!"

Syme's temper was going and his caution with it.
“So I would stand by him—and will, if he ever wants a friend.”

“Lord preserve him from his friends, then!” grinned Syme.

“What do you mean? What do you insinuate?” cried the other, striding fiercely across the room.

“There, be aisy, Pat! You fly out like an angry woman! What should I insinuate, man? I’m as innocent as a babe.”

“I hate your d—d sneering ways!”

“A starving doctor must work off his spleen somehow, Terence; and a man can’t always be cussing. Come, you’ve known what it is to be poor and bitter yourself.”

“Why are you always so down on old Simon, who is the best fellow alive? Because, forsooth, an old woman died, thanks to your being the worse for liquor and incapable of attending her, and Simon—”

“Because,” cried Syme in a savage voice, which made Terence’s wrath seem thin and
trifling as a girl's, "because he chose to denounce me for that slip, to spoil my chance, take the bread out of my mouth. D—n his virtuous tongue and maudlin benevolence. I mean to be even with him for all that!"

"Well, that was hard, Jack. I feel for you there; having known the sting of poverty myself, as you say. But now I'm coming in for this practice, I shall be able to give you a hand, old fellow—pass you on some patients; and, if business flourishes, maybe I shall want an assistant."

"Upon my soul, you're a good-hearted fellow, Terence, though—a bit slippery," Syme was going to add; but had the grace to check his tongue.

"And as for old Simon, I can't tell you what he has been to me, how consumed with impotent gratitude towards him I feel. Well, now I must make a start down the river, so lend me your rod and fly-book, Jack."

Jack Syme watched his friend march
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cheerfully off down the road to the stile and into the meadows, stopping to wave his rod before he disappeared by the river.

"He means well," mused Syme. "But Lord help Secretan all the same!"

As Terence sauntered by Chilling water, stopping to make a cast here and there in leisurely fashion, he was flushed with a glow of conscious virtue. He felt that there was genuine nobility in his renunciation of the evening's pleasure at Moor Gates. Pleasure! That was a mild term for the satisfying happiness of being with—with people who understood and appreciated him. What was she doing at this moment? Practising the second of the new duet they were to have sung to night? Would she be a little disappointed when Simon drove up without his friend? Terence thought so, and the thought sent a swirl of pleasure through his system, followed by a sour reaction. It was hard to be loaded with gratitude, to be
chained like a dog to a post, to be given his food and drink and have his body pampered while his soul starved. What—what unutterable happiness! Yes, yes, it had truly come to that—happiness beside which mere material prosperity was as nothing, was set just beyond his reach, just outside the utmost stretch of his chain! Should he cast off this chain, refuse Simon's gift, frankly and honestly enter the lists against him? Why should sweet Nell be sacrificed on the altar of honour? Oh, curse these trammels of conventionality, by which warm hearts were kept from beating. Refuse the gift—win and wear Nell? The idea was magnificent, intoxicating! But could she be won, with her Quixotic fidelity, her rigid sense of truth and loyalty?

"No, no; she's no true woman," muttered Terence resentfully. "With her, honour comes before love. And, if I failed, what a morass of poverty before me!"
He sighed heavily. Never had the craving for sympathetic appreciation been so strong upon him. He reeled up his line quickly, and began to hasten his steps as though making for some definite goal.

Deep down in the Hollacombe woods there was an elbow of the river called "Black Pool," into which the narrowed Chilling foamed and gushed over great black-green boulders. A favourite spot of Terence's; a place lost in the still seclusion of wooded hills, whither a breeze hardly ever found its way. No one else came there—at least, hardly any one. One person he had met there sometimes. She might be there to-day; and he yearned for a sympathetic listener to whom he might hint his troubles. At any rate, Black Pool was worth a trial to-day.

Hot and weary, he at length reached his goal, emerging from the oak coppice on to the narrow ribbon of mossy grass that
bordered the pool. But Fate was as harsh as usual—no one was there.

He threw himself down irritably among the boulders and watched the yellow foam-clots creeping slowly past upon the deep heaving swirl of the backwater. He cast Syme's rod down sulkily, and the slender top-joint snapped in its socket. He could not even fish then; there was nothing left him but a three-mile tramp homewards through the stifling woods. The picture of the cool garden at Moor Gates recurred to Terence insistently. Was Nell sitting at the corner of the larch plantation now? Would she really care when—— Hark! What was that? Surely the crisp rip-rip of a woman's drapery among the brake-fern. His mood changed in a moment, his face brightened, a smile hovered about the corners of his mouth.

"'Tis Mary, after all, sure as I'm a sinner! Well, Mary, where have ye hidden yourself all these years and months?"
Mary Pethick was dressed coquettishly in a cream-coloured frock with pink ribbons peeping out of its cunning-simple folds; but her manner was dull and depressed. The pretty curves of her mouth drooped like those of a tired child as she shook hands with Terence.

"Was the pink and cream designed for me or Ezekiel?" thought he. "What ails ye at all?" he asked aloud.

"Oh, I hate the world, and every one in it—that's all!"

"That's a good sweeping statement, Mary, and I hope it'll ease your mind."

Terence perceived that his rôle must after all be that of listener, that his grievances must needs wait awhile.

"Pray don't laugh at me, Mr. Clancy. I can't bear it now, I am so miserable!"

It was clear that a shower was imminent; and Terence's ready sympathy, creeping into his eyes and voice, hastened its
arrival. A woman's tears had always a powerful appeal for good-natured Terence. He took her hand and stroked it.

"Come, child, tell me what ails you."

He was much tempted to kiss away her tears, but something withheld him. He had enjoyed many friendly, semi-flirting interviews with pretty Mary, but had never kissed her; and, as it was, she cared for him perhaps a little more than he wished. In fact, Terence had unheedingly drifted into the peculiar position of finding two women, both apparently trembling on the verge of love for him, and each formally betrothed to another man. The situation was intensely titivating to his vanity, while at the same time it filled him with uneasiness. He could not without grievous loss of self-respect make open love to Nell—at least he always tried to refrain from doing so. Yet, so hard was the task of thus deliberately throwing away happiness that he needed the consolation and en-
couragement of a sentimental friendship with Mary in order to carry it through; while the secrecy and danger attending upon this friendship—for Terence had a heartfelt dread of Ezekiel Doidge—gave it a special zest and flavour.

As the tears fell from Mary's hazel eyes, Terence had one of his good impulses. Why not, he put it to himself, throw aside this playing with edge-tools up at Moor Gates and ask pretty Mary to be his wife? He would never be happy—never, as he felt in his best moments, be quite straight and loyal to his friend—until he were definitely bound to some one who would keep a jealous eye upon him. Mary was, perhaps, a little vain and shallow, but really gentle and good-hearted, and somewhat of an heiress too. Her deaf old father, with whom she lived in the solitary Hollacomb Farm, was a retired tradesman of Chillington, a "warm man," as people said, and she was his only child.
Mary was refined and accomplished, moreover; she held her head far above the tradesmen's daughters of the town, leading a very lonely life in consequence. Her birth was no serious bar, from Terence's point of view; he was peasant-born himself. And as the wife of the leading doctor of the neighbourhood, she would probably make her way well enough, he considered. As for Ezekiel Doidge, she would doubtless throw him over without hesitation, were the brilliant Terence to hold up his finger. Ah! there was the hitch. A prize so easily captured seemed hardly worth the winning; there was no romance, no fascinating "perhaps" in the matter. Yet Terence was much moved in this direction, the good impulse was strong within him. Mary's future, as well as that of several others, was hanging in the balance just now, and much would depend, did she but know it, upon how she handled Terence, now that the good impulse had made him workable.
Mary did not begin well. With a man of quick perceptions like Mr. Clancy she should have been always on her guard, always at her very best, always endeavouring to veil the natural selfishness of a spoiled girl. To enlarge upon Ezekiel's tiresome devotion was hardly the way to evoke the worship of another man; but she was too full of her troublesome lover to keep silence about him. She described, in a querulous, half-tearful way, his jealous exactions, his insistent desire to possess her every thought, hope, and feeling. She told how he had lately purchased, simply with a view to exalting himself in her eyes, the *Chillington Free Press*, and now did half the editing work himself; how he flooded its columns with long, flowery articles from his own pen, and always persisted in reading them aloud for her edification.

"And, would you believe it, Mr. Clancy," she concluded, "Ezekiel has taken to the violin! Just to please me he slaves away at
it half through the night, and for it neglects much of his business at the mill during the day. He wishes to accompany me in my songs—me, and he has no ear! It is horrible to hear him saw his way through true notes and false with equal ardour. Ah! if he would but be satisfied with his literary compositions and spare me that dreadful music! But I don't know what he wouldn't attempt to win my approval."

"I see what it is," commented Terence, when her outburst had come to an end, "the man is fool enough to care for you too much. That's fatal with any woman, and with most men as well. Too much love is far worse than too little—a hateful truth, isn't it? a painful comment upon poor human nature."

Mary only pouted and was silent. She wanted, not philosophic analysis, but sympathetic appreciation. She thought Mr. Clancy would have been jealous of her lover's devotion, while he seemed to regard
it simply in the light of an interesting phenomenon.

"You don't feel for me a bit!" she cried petulantly. "You don't care how wretched I am! You haven't been here for weeks; you don't know what a burden I have to bear. I'm afraid of Ezekiel; and you can't say that I've been untrue to him, for I never pretended to love him."

"Why not throw him over, Mary? Surely that would be the honest thing to do?"

"I dare not! you don't know him. He has strange notions about justice and punishing people. I fear him—oh, I fear him! I dread even to think of these meetings of ours coming to his ears. He would punish me, and you too, in some dreadful way. You laugh now, but you wouldn't then; you don't know Ezekiel. Mr. Clancy, I do hope you never mention my name to a human soul?"

"Why, of course not, Mary."

"I haven't courage or strength," continued
Mary, with emotion, "to get clear of Ezekiel by myself. He hangs upon me like an old man of the sea."

"Couldn't your father help you?"

"No, no, no! He reveres Ezekiel, and fears him too, and is bent upon my marrying him. You see, Ezekiel owns a good deal of land, as well as the flourishing business of the mill. He is the wealthiest man in Chillington, and hardly considers even the county people above him; in fact, he looks upon your friend Mr. Secretan as a sort of rival."

Terence laughed.

"Sure the man's an hysterical fool. Why ever did you get engaged to him, Mary?"

"It was just vanity, I suppose," she answered simply. "It was so delicious to have the important, clever Mr. Doidge half dying for love of me. Ah, he was in earnest too, and is still. I can't tell you how he loves me—poor Ezekiel!"
"Oh, well, if you pity him so much as all that——"

"Yes—but I pity myself more."

"Then you must shake yourself clear, my good child; not all of a sudden, but gradually. Make it unpleasant for him; treat him with doses of coldness and slow-torturing jealousy, and bedad! he'll be glad enough to be rid o' ye."

"But wouldn't that be rather—mean?"

Mary asked, with a depreciating blush.

"By the powers! if you're too timid to speak out, and too high-flown even for innocent manoeuvring, ye'd better fix your wedding-day and have done with it."

"Pray don't be angry with me!" pleaded the girl humbly. "You're the only friend I have. There's not a soul in the place for me to confide in, except you, and—and I'm so very miserable."

Terence was angry at her implied rebuke of him; but all the same she had risen in his
estimation. Mary was more honest, sounder at the core, than he had thought. Without knowing it, she was now pleading her own cause, not ineffectually. His little fit of temper passed quickly. He eyed Mary furtively as she sat before him on the rock, her small hands folded in her lap. In her humble, pleading mood, with gentle hazel eyes swimming, she looked very pretty and alluring. Again did Terence ask himself, "Why not?" and "Should I be safe with her?"

There was something almost pathetic in his self-distrust, his desire to be held straight, tied down, kept true. If he lacked stability, he was far from lacking kind feeling; and just now he was entering upon one of those self-luminous moments that come at times to most men, the brief epochs when the difficult command, "Know thyself," can really be obeyed. With swift shame he realized through what a morass of small treacheries
he had been wading lately; how he had been making covert love to Nell day by day, cunningly and carefully planning how to lull any possible suspicions of those around her, luring her into caring for him by imperceptible degrees. His every look and word had been a disloyalty to his friend. With swift penitence he swore now to purge himself of this trickery and falsehood. Already, perhaps, he had compromised Nell’s peace of mind, reduced to a minimum his benefactor’s chance of married happiness. Simon should nurse an adder no longer. Terence vowed to draw out his own treacherous sting, to be a true and faithful friend from this day forth. Ah, how cheering and cleansing was this resolution! Already Terence felt a stirring akin to the exaltation of a Wolsey upon finding “the blessedness of being little”: “the blessedness of being honest is better still,” he muttered.

Mary saw that he was engaged in a mental
wrestle as he strode to and fro on the narrow strip of green. A soft glow of happiness began to steal over her. He was coming nearer to her: the gallant, the handsome, the admired Terence Clancy was really growing to love her. How gladly, with his love to sustain and prop her weakness, would she extricate herself from this hateful engagement, ay, and would make Terence a good and faithful wife. She loved him; she knew it now. It had come upon her quite suddenly. She turned her swimming eyes upon him, and his own caught fire at their shining.

He drew nearer to her; his flushed face was bending down to hers, his hand seeking her hand. Almost—almost she had won him!

Alas for poor Mary! At the very moment of her triumph Clancy paled, starting back hastily.

"Some one is coming!" he whispered, glancing nervously up-stream; "a fisher-
man, I think. Good Heaven, 'tis that black Ezekiel himself! Run, Mary! Meet me here this time three days hence. I shan’t be free before. Run hard, child!"

He had snatched up his rod and switched flies and gut anyhow among the eddies before Mary had well disappeared.

"Well met, doctor—well met, sir!" Ezekiel was exclaiming five minutes afterwards. "Fishing away hard, I see. I'm trying to get a trout or two myself for—for my sweetheart, Mary."

The strong dark man blushed like a girl; his voice grew tender with the mention of his sweetheart's name.

"You haven't chanced to see her about here, I reckon, mister?"

"No, no: Miss Petherick do you mean?"

"Pethick's the name, sir—Mary Pethick."

"No, I've seen no one."

"Well, she don't often come down to the river, on account of the steep climb up to
the farm. She walks by the canal mostly. Reckon I'll start up-along at once."

"Stop a minute, and give me a hint or two about your local flies, there's a good fellow."

"You'm welcome to all my knowledge, mister: an' I know more about fishing than any one for miles round. Your flies are too small for our Chilling, I see. You want a good-sized Red Spinner with gold twist, an Oak, and a Blue Upright. That's your cast for to-day. Take some o' my flies, doctor: they'm better tied than any you'll buy about here. Take the whole bookful, for I'm in a hurry."

"You're awfully good-natured, I'm sure. Don't let me keep you. One moment, though. What do you think of these little Grey Spiders?"

"Ain't worth a d—n," cried Doidge, impatiently. Before the words were out of his mouth he had plunged into the woods.
"She has got a fair start," muttered Terence. "But may the devil fly away with that cock-a-hoop, omniscient fool for giving me such a scare!"

Then he wended his way homewards, somewhat chilled and depressed, as well as frightened at his narrow escape. Fate always seemed to thwart him in his good moments, and to hustle him forward in his bad ones.
CHAPTER VIII.

HE so-called "canal," beside which stood her solitary home, Hollacombe Farm, was a gently sliding piece of water, that seemed to Mary Pethick to have been running through her life like a thread, binding the simple incidents together, and serving as a connecting link between the dull-grey home-existence and the brighter possibilities of Chillington town. This canal was simply an artificial stream or leat, by which a portion of the limpid Chilling was conducted from its main bed (a dam being formed just below the town bridge to facilitate the operation), past a couple of disused
mines, and so into the only big river of the neighbourhood, the Culmer. The leat had been designed as a carrier for the two mines; but their owner having failed about the time of its completion, the workings were discontinued, and the little river never knew the burden of a single hundredweight of metal. It began its career by running briskly through the vicarage garden; then, losing energy as it drew away from its foaming parent, dawdled curvingly through the meadows below John Syme's surgery, under the stone bridge which carried the Monks Damerel road; past the new church and last outlying cottages of the town, and so vanished into the leafy fastnesses of Hollacombe.

The path beside the canal, as being the only route townwards, was more than familiar to Mary. She would fall out with the little stream as with a friend—one day walking briskly along it to some musical
triumph at the Town Hall, the next, mooning sadly along its banks, complaining of the emptiness of her lot. She would, in fanciful moods, share her griefs and pleasures with this friendly companion, or throw a brace of leaflets upon its surface to represent herself and the lover of the moment. For, to speak frankly, Mary had accepted the adoration of quite a little army of lovers. Her musical talents, coquetry, and other attractions had wrought much havoc in the neighbourhood; the cream of all the young shopkeepers of the town and well-to-do farmers from the country round had been at Mary's feet.

Nor was there any one to keep the girl in check. The deaf old father left her to go her own way; her only other relations in the place, the two ancient Miss Pethicks, who kept the circulating library, had all the will to keep a tight rein on Mary, but lacked the necessary judgment and nicety of hand. Too much flicking with whip and sawing
with bit had induced that state of nervous irritation in which retaliation upon the occupant of the box-seat becomes the main object in life. Thus Mary never acquired a new sweetheart without straightway parading him before the eyes of those critical aunts; and doubtless one of her minor objections to Ezekiel was the satisfaction her engagement to him gave the Miss Pethicks. Not that they made her pleasant speeches upon the subject, but rather were careful to declare, with the native fatuity of spiteful people, that the wealthy and respected Mr. Doidge was a deal too good for their feather-headed niece.

Ezekiel himself, to do him justice, had now—whatever had been his former views—no thought of being too good for Mary. Perhaps she was the only created being to whom he did not think himself superior; but towards her he had learned to show a humility quite at variance with the main
drift of his character, which sometimes touched her deeply, sometimes encouraged her to bully him. For poor Ezekiel managed to be over-intense in his humility, as he had been in his arrogance, and as he would be in all things to the end of the chapter. He was a man as little understood by his public as Simon Secretan himself. Some people went so far as to call him half-crazy, hinting darkly that there was madness in the Doidge family; others thought the hot Celtic blood inherited from a long line of Cornish ancestors was enough to account for even his vagaries of passion. At any rate, his fierce devotion to Mary was a kind of furnace in which many of his faults had been burnt up and purged away.

How this perfervid and peculiar lover would eventually fare at the hands of so wayward, and presumably shallow, a girl as Mary Pethick people often wondered; but by being present at a single interview
between them we may be in a position to make forecasts on our own account.

It is the day but one after Mary’s interview with Terence Clancy by Black Pool. Ezekiel has been spending the best part of the afternoon at the farm, practising the violin, and has the instrument tucked under his arm now as he and Mary stroll by the canal.

At the present moment he is hardly recognizable as the overbearing Mr. Doidge of the Mill, whose arrogance, as his enemies have been known to declare, mars the peace of a whole community. His hard, black eyes are softened; his brow smoothed; his shabby clothes, which are generally understood to be part of his greatness, have been exchanged for decent attire; the whole physical aspect of the man speaks to the softening effect of Mary’s presence.

This kinder mood has been commoner with him lately; all those about him have
remarked his growing forbearance. Bitter experience has at last taught him that to be at one moment a door-mat for a man to trample upon, at the next a lay figure whereon to exhibit his general superiority, is not the ideal of all women—a useful discovery; but, meantime, what of Mary?

She has been meeting Terence Clancy, basking in the sympathy of a softer, more genial nature than Ezekiel’s—in the friendship of a man, his superior in culture, breeding, and every outward quality that makes for love. She is thinking of Terence now—thinking with gentle melancholy of the parting by the pool, and with a strange fluttering hope of the “meeting on the morrow.” By nature she is wayward, not false; but these two men—one by hard superiority, the other by dangerous, unthinking kindness—have sapped her fealty, prepared the soil of her heart for a crop of treachery to be reaped in due season.
“Mary dear,” says Ezekiel, stooping to look in her face, “you’re a little witch. You’ve been making odd changes in me lately. I let off a mill-hand with a reprimand this morning, whom a month ago I should have sent packing. Somehow I’ve got to think that bare justice doesn’t sum up the whole duty of man to his fellow—"

“... Well, you’ve never stopped at bare justice, Ezekiel; you’ve gone far beyond that in dealing with your fellow-man; you’ve given him cutting criticism, hard words, and many other little extras. Pray don’t up-braid yourself too readily!”

“... You are hard, bitter hard to-day, Mary. Ah, you know how to wound a man when you’re in this mood!”

“... Yes; I’ve borrowed some of your nature. One can’t touch pitch without being defiled, you know.”

Ezekiel’s pale face—he is a pale man, though broad-framed and muscular—is full of pain.

VOL. I.
“Don’t be too hard, my girl; don’t throw away the power for good you have over me!”

“Oh, I decline to be responsible for you. You’ve made my life a burden to me, more or less, for the last six months, and I won’t be made to bear the weight of your soul as well as your heart.”

Mary notes with pleasure how he winces under her lash. She hardly knows herself; is amazed at her own delight in hurting another’s feelings. Is it the after-sting of past, wearing jealousies and tiresome ex- actions that gives her this new taste? She seizes upon the excuse with avidity, yet it is more probably exasperation at Ezekiel’s present kindness that moves her. Her duplicity pricks her conscience now that he shows his better side; his humble devotion stands in the way of the comforting self-justification she desires.

“Let us change the subject,” says Ezekiel,
mastering his fiery temper with difficulty, and thrusting his shaking hands into his pockets; "let us go back to the music. Don't you think I've improved lately? Lord knows I've worked at it like a slave!"

"Just so. You have improved because you have worked at it like a slave, not on account of any talent."

"But I played well this afternoon? You said so yourself."

"Yes, well for you, Ezekiel; but unfortunately you have what I may call a fatal ear, which is far worse than none at all. You keep true for a time, then play perhaps a quarter of a note flat, and half kill the listener. If a string runs down, you're not aware of it; you rasp the ear just as you often rasp one's feelings—from sheer inability to—"

"That's enough. See there—that thing I'll never sound a false note again!" Seizing his violin by the neck, he has brought it
furiously down upon a gate-post, smashing it to fragments.

"Come, that is indeed a proof of my power, and a welcome one," she cried, with a mocking laugh.

"What has come to you, Mary? You never used to find pleasure in jeering at me!"

"Because your teaching has taken some time to soak in. But now I am equal to the task of wounding anybody."

A kind of despair now fell upon Ezekiel. With a sickening pain it dawned upon him that his reform had come too late; that Mary's heart had really slipped from his grasp. The fear was not new, though hitherto his stubborn egoism had always been equal to the task of casting it aside.

"Mary," he muttered with dry lips, "are you turning from me?"

The yearning humility of this man, who was never humble to any one, touched the girl in spite of herself. Her mocking
laugh ceased abruptly, her eyes began to fill.

"Up till lately you've been so hard and jealous and domineering that now I don't know how——"

"How to take me? God forgive me!" cried the passionate man; "I've deserved this. I've done my best to earn your hatred. I can make no excuse—can only throw myself upon your mercy."

They were standing now at an elbow of the canal, some distance below the farm, where the water deepened suddenly, creeping sluggishly along, reed-fringed, and canopied by heavy alders. Close to them was an old stone bridge, moss-grown, half buried in ivy.

"See, Mary"—he led her on to the bridge by the hand—"here's the spot where you first put this little hand into mine. 'Tis a sacred spot to me. I've never glanced at another woman since then, dear. Conceited
fool though I be, I've always loved you. Put that down as a makeweight to my other faults—nay, nay, don't balance up my failin's at all, sweetheart, but just bear with me a little longer. Give me one month to win you back in; for that time I won't so much as speak of love to 'ee; I'll be just a humble servant waiting on your pleasure."

"Ezekiel, I'd rather not—be engaged any more."

"You won't give me even that chance?" He leaned upon the bridge parapet as though oppressed by physical weakness. "Is there—some one else, Mary?"

"You've no right to ask!" cried she, with flaming cheeks.

"No right—to—ask? and you—my—betrothed wife?"

"I wish to be so no longer; I entreat you to release me. Oh, I want to be free—free; I can hardly breathe under this miserable weight!"
"Mary, is it that—that Secretan?"

There was a quick flutter of surprise in Mary's face. She moved away from the bridge, thinking hard, her eyes on the grass. Circumstances had suddenly, without a moment's warning, placed a peculiar temptation in her path. She perceived at once what had given this drift to Ezekiel's jealousy. She had always admired the stately Simon, both as being a fine, handsome man, and as one whose praises were especially obnoxious to Ezekiel. Moreover, Simon had frequently been at the farm lately to see her father, who, upon retiring from business and the Chillington world, had revived an ancient taste for reading, with a special leaning in the direction of mild science. He devoured with avidity all works on popular astronomy; and good-natured Simon would often take the Holla-comb route into the town, in order to provide Mr. Pethick with a new book, or exchange
a few shouting remarks on the last one read. More than once Ezekiel had seen His Mightiness, as his jealousy was wont to name Simon, ride into the small farmyard; and Mary was always careful to greet Mr. Secretan with particular effusion when Ezekiel happened to be anywhere about.

In this way the seed had been sown quite simply and naturally, and now was Mary's opportunity for rooting up the young plant by a single honest word. A month ago she would have done so without a moment's hesitation, but now she wavered, weighing pros and cons. The honest course was no longer a first instinct; the poison of duplicity had begun to work in her. Again, just as Terence and she had been so lately, she was at the meeting of two ways, and without a suspicion that much hung upon her decision. People are constantly thus in a position to carve out their own destiny; circumstances, which seem to move in a
resistless tide, are constantly pausing, as it were, to give human weakness a chance; so that most tragedies, upon looking back, are seen to have been led up to by a whole vista, not so much of accidents as of missed opportunities. And these milestones on the road to disaster have the curious property of becoming bigger and clearer the farther we get from them.

To let an honourable man such as Simon Secretan be seriously suspected would a few weeks back have been low conduct in Mary’s eyes. Even now she shrank from the trickery; yet—yet this definite despatch of Suspicion upon a false scent would be highly convenient. She had a real dread of Ezekiel; she feared him for Terence’s sake, more and more as Terence grew more dear. Now, with Ezekiel safely embarked upon a false scent, she and Terence could meet with comparative safety, and—and very soon—as soon as ever she was free of her present
lover—she would become bound to Terence; he would acknowledge her as his betrothed wife. Ezekiel would do nothing then; she did him the justice to believe that he would never move a finger to bar her happiness, but until then he was not to be trusted. After all, it seemed safer, wiser, almost more right, to let him continue in his mistake.

Mary felt something like a return of sympathy towards Ezekiel when she rejoined him on the bridge. There was no visible self-pity about him, and his stoicism always provoked her respect. No one ever knew this man cry out when he was hurt; his weak health—probably especially irksome to a man of such vigorous spirit—was never hinted at by himself. If he looked for patient endurance from other people, his precepts were certainly well backed by example. Mary laid a hand on his shoulder, but he shook it off roughly, asking again—
"Is it really Mr. Secretan, though you're always laughin' at my jealousy o' he?"

She turned aside without speaking—lied without opening her lips.

Ezekiel laughed mockingly, without looking up from the water. He was in reality relieved by her confession, since a rival in his own class must needs have been far more dangerous. She could have nothing more than a passing fancy for one so much above her.

"How can you be such a fool, Mary?"—his voice spoke of returning hope. "Surely you ha'n't believed the absurd rumour that his engagement is shaky; that Dr. Clancy has been cutting him out up at Moor Gates?"

The flush called up by her falsehood ebbed suddenly from Mary's cheek.

"Who told you that?" she asked breathlessly.

"Psha! Some long-eared fool or other—Chillington breeds plenty of 'em. Dr.
Clancy's a favourite up there, as everywhere else; and our long-ears build a two-storied scandal on that little circumstance. You don't know the doctor, by-the-by, do you?"

"No."

"Well, I do; and he's the last man in the world to go sneaking after other people's belongings. A decent, modest fellow enough, is Clancy, rather like a woman to look at, but well enough for a doctor. I shall probably recommend him to my friends, so long as he don't grow uppish. However, he has nothing to do with us, Mary, and I must now tell you what I propose to do. I'm willing to admit that I've rather driven you into foolishness lately, but then you have my promise of amendment. I won't set you free yet; you remain bound to me for one week more; then, not till then, you shall cut me adrift. I wouldn't keep you unwillin', my girl, but I won't have you leaving me for a mere whim neither.
And whether bound to me or not, be very sure that I shall keep a watchful eye on you. If that Secretan casts a single glance your way that he shouldn't, let him look to himself; but I don't suspect him seriously—at least, not yet. And now we'll get along back to the farm. Don't be afear'd that I shall make love to you. I would leave you here now this minute, but I don't care to have you wandering about these solitary paths alone."
CHAPTER IX.

ERENCE CLANCY had for the first time in his life spent the night under a roof that was his very own. He had been called by his own servant, bounded lightly down his own stairs, breakfasted off his own plates of quaint old china, looking out upon the smooth lawn and old-fashioned flower-beds of his own garden. The fresh, keen joy of possession made his eyes sparkle; his heart swelled as he stood under his creeper-clad verandah, looking down over the little town, peaceful, sunlit, and with the bright ribbon of Chilling Water flashing here and there between the intercepting grey walls,
and foaming through the breadth of emerald beyond. But yesterday he had been a struggling seeker after daily bread,—and now! Why, now he owned one of the best houses in Chillington, with a hack and a hunter in its stables—for he found to his joy that he would be expected to hunt one day a week during the season, Dr. Rose having firmly established that desirable custom—and, in short, everything he had ever hoped for. The practice was the best in these parts: he would need an assistant as soon as he settled down, and proposed to engage Jack Syme, thus setting the old fellow on his legs at a stroke. It all seemed like magic; Simon's generosity had given him a new lease of life, converted the dim world into a joyous playground.

Nor had Terence any intention of finally accepting all this as a gift; in the course of a few years he would easily save enough to repay old Simon every penny. For from
this day forth he was going to be a steady, careful, safe, hard-working man; all his little weaknesses were to be thrown aside. Already he could reflect with encouragement upon one piece of prudence safely accomplished—he had cut himself adrift from pretty Mary Pethick. Business had prevented his keeping the appointment made by Black Pool a short time since, and his new-born sobriety would prevent his making another. It would, after all, be absurd to hamper himself with a wife while upon the very threshold of his career; nor would his old weakness for feminine sympathy trouble him, now that he had work into which he could throw himself with heart and hope.

All the business connected with the house and garden had been accomplished, and to-night Simon was to dine with him; after which they were to adjourn together to a solicitor's office, with a view to completing also the deed of assignment of Dr. Rose's practice.
Emerging presently from his reflections under the verandah, Terence hurried into his little study and wrote off a jubilant letter to his family in Ireland, requesting that two out of the six younger brothers should at once be sent over to be brought up and educated at his expense. The comfort of thus giving a helping hand to his people, whom he had rather forgotten during the last year or two, elated him still further. He strode out again into the sunlight, and glanced along the road which dipped steeply into the town.

Just rising the hill Terence saw a cavalcade, which sent his heart into his mouth. He had not been up to Moor Gates for some time, had resolutely refused the invitations brought by Simon, and now, as though to reward his self-denial, Moor Gates was coming to him. It was the culminating moment of the morning when he caught sight of the cavalcade, which comprised
Simon Secretan—easily recognizable by his tall figure and the big iron-grey he rode—and three ladies: to wit, Mrs. French-Chichester, Miss Tredethlyn, and, yes—Miss Nell.

Simon trotted on ahead of his convoy, rode in through the front gate and round the little gravel sweep, and was greeted by Clancy from the steps.

"Terence, I've news for you—I hear that the peal are running up the Culmer in shoals. You must get out your fourteen-footer and mount instanter. I've been wanting something of this sort, just to celebrate the commencement of your reign at the White House. You can't begin work to-day; everyone knows you're not half settled down yet. As there's sport in question, I ought to have left the ladies at home, but they would come, and have promised faithfully not to interfere with us—in fact, to let us alone and look after the lunch. Probably Rush will join us
too, for I’ve sent him a message. Come, don’t hesitate, old fellow; tell them to saddle ‘Rosalind’ at once, while you get out the tackle.”

Terence’s heart gave a great leap. A long day in the Culmer Vale with the Tredethlyns? The prospect made him dizzy. He was not allowed to avoid them. Fate positively threw them across his path. Could he refuse? Impossible—he could not throw away this last perfect holiday. Tomorrow he would be in harness, and this would be his very last scamper; and he was not made of cast iron; and—and at this point he vanished indoors.

A quarter of an hour later they were all cantering through the Hollacombe woods along a moss-grown bridle path. Terence rode in front with Mrs. French-Chichester and Nell, by whose side he had never ridden before. The sunbeams were dancing across the glades, streaming through crisp foliage
of dwarf oaks; the rush of the hidden Chilling was filling their ears with merry music; the summer breeze was playing with Nell's dark hair.

Nell had been out of sorts and depressed lately, but to-day a change had set in and her spirits were radiant; while, as for Mrs. French-Chichester, she was never one to refuse the challenge of bright weather and genial company. Moreover, she had good reason to be satisfied with things in general this morning, for was not Simon, with the delightful fatuity which always distinguished him in matters which concerned his own interests, playing into her hand, thrusting Nell into the very charmed circle that had been prepared by herself?

Nor did Terence fail to note the widow's sly satisfaction. He was far too clear-sighted not to be aware that she had been working to a certain end lately; he could always feel her hand at his back, as it were, thrusting
him gently towards Nell. The drift of her desire was patent to him, but her motives puzzled him altogether. He rightly conceived that she would not be taking all this pains for the mere gratification of an old grudge against Simon, but what further motive could she have? This problem was beyond him at present, but he meant to work out a solution ere long.

Meanwhile she poured forth such a stream of anecdote and banter that her auditors only recovered from one fit of laughter in time to fall headlong into another. Most of her tales were about Simon and his fads; for in the art of administering a full dose of disparagement, disguised in a froth of chaff and raillery, she had few equals, and this opportunity was not to be thrown away. She had the light quick touch which makes comedy out of anything, and pricks a character so deftly that no wound shows. She seemed to be praising Simon while she was
really drawing blood from him, and the quiet woodlands rang with the merriment of as cheery a party of three as had ever cantered across the velvet shadows of Hollacomb.

Miss Tredethlyn and Simon were in a far less genial frame of mind. Kate had chosen to fall back some distance behind the others. There was an atmosphere of coming storm about her, which Simon might have perceived by her smart way of laying her whip to her horse, and by the drawing together of her dark brows; but he was dreaming as usual, pondering with satisfaction over the hopeful prospects of his friend Terence.

"Simon," began his companion in her most peremptory tone, checking her chafing horse as they first turned into the woods.

"He's bound to succeed," muttered Simon, "for once in a way one's efforts to give a helping hand will not have fallen flat."

"You are speaking of Mr. Clancy, of course?"
"Yes; I was thinking—"

"Simon, I do wish you would observe more and think less!"

Now, Simon had a combative side as well as Kate; smart skirmishing was not unknown between them, and, the one being fond of disparaging Clancy, while the other was easily heated in a friend's cause, they now both prepared for the fray.

"I don't much believe in this popular hero of yours."

"Substitute 'appreciate' for 'believe,' Kate. You're too hard and cynical in your estimate of people, if you'll allow me to say so."

"You're too blindly good-natured and idealistic in your estimation of them, if you'll allow me to say so."

"I'm perfectly aware that you don't perceive Terence's good qualities."

"And you?" cried Kate, with sudden passion. "You perceive nothing that goes
on around you: you go mauldering on, lost in some mathematical problem—or philanthropic one, about equally useless—and never see the dangers that beset those who are dear to you! Oh, I know nothing in the world so exasperating as your besotted—There, I can't speak of it in polite language. And I can do nothing with her; it would be a kind of sacrilege to take Nell to task about it. A pretty pair of innocents you are—and how bitterly exasperating I find you!"

"What on earth has Nell to do with Terence's good qualities?"

"Nothing—nothing in the world. Nell's an angel; not in the least mortal; without the flesh and blood of ordinary people; and we're all Arcadian shepherds and shepherdesses together."

"I don't know what mare's nest you've discovered, Kate; I don't in the least understand your drift."

"I know, I know. For mercy's sake, let
us talk about crooks, or sheep-cotes, or something you do understand!"

"However," Simon continued, with a slow-spreading flush upon his large, handsome features, "since candour closely bordering upon rudeness is the order of the day, I don't mind favouring you with a home-truth or two. I should like to know, for one thing, why you always think fit to snub and mortify my friend Julius Rush, one of the best fellows going?"

"A rival of the perfect Terence Clancy—another immaculate, dear friend," mocked Kate; "and so well born too!"

"I tell you frankly that I consider this insistence upon the accident of a man's birth—a man of culture and a thorough gentleman, moreover—downright vulgar."

"What business has a tailor's son with culture? Veneer won't make a gentleman."

"A most abominable sentiment! You would measure a man's worth by——"
"I wouldn't measure any one. The mere sight of a yard wand is hateful to me."

So the foolish pair wrangled on, and, thanks to a little infirmity of temper on both sides, this effort of Kate's to hoist a needed danger signal proved entirely abortive.

"You're little better than a Honeywood, Simon, and some day your good nature will land you in the mire." This was Kate's parting shot. She delivered it with an angry nod and a resentful glance at her companion, then lashed her mare into a gallop and shot away from him.

But neither Simon nor his tall grey were to be left in the lurch thus, and the argument ended in a neck-and-neck race along the glade.

"You've been wrangling as usual, you two!" cried Mrs. French-Chichester, as the combative pair drew rein. "Nell, my dear, you must take charge of Simon while I endeavour to soothe your sister. Keep the
fractious couple apart we must, by hook or by crook. Listen, Kate, I have cheering news for you, to the effect that Captain Rush is to join us presently, and will probably bring his father the tail—ahem!—forgive the pain I was on the point of causing you—I should have said the ex-artist-in-cloth-to-the-nobility-and-gentry-of-the-West-End; lengthiness being the soul of delicacy, as brevity of wit. The ex-artist is a connoisseur, Kate; he will appreciate the really excellent build of your habit and Nell's. I must say you both look charming, and your charms will not be wasted this time. I always think there's a close kinship between your tailor and your sculptor, and feel as much moved to pose before the former as the latter."

Simon, whose weakness was to take things too much to heart, was deeply offended by these remarks—just as the speaker intended. Captain Rush was a very old friend of his.
They had been at Cambridge together, and their mutual liking had been growing ever since. Rush was a man to be trusted, one he could turn to in a difficulty; for Terence, the newer friend, his affection was of a more protecting, sentimental order. Kate had been disparaging both with equal ardour, and now Cousin Kathleen had given a neat finishing stroke to Simon’s irritation.

Nell dreaded an outburst on Simon’s part—for he was a hard hitter when roused, and utterly reckless as to whom he offended; but, perceiving the coming storm in time, she managed to draw him away before he had time to commit himself. As she rode forward with him out of earshot of the others, the cousin smiled maliciously, muttering to herself, “I hope she’ll appreciate the difference between this great sulky bear and my pretty boy Terence!”

“What a peacemaker our charming Nell is!” she exclaimed aloud, “and well she
may be, Kate, for truly my Lord Simon wants a deal of management. Really, Mr. Clancy, I'm surprised that you can contrive to retain the friendship of this good old hot-headed cousin of mine."

"So am I," acquiesced Kate, in a dry tone, which sounded unpleasantly to Terence. Miss Tredethlyn seemed to be growing suspicious.

Mrs. French-Chichester also made a mental jotting as to Kate's hostile attitude, but was not the least disconcerted thereat. The presence of an opponent always gave additional zest to her schemes; not so much on account of any leaning towards a fair fight, as from the keen pleasure she took in out-maneuvering and overreaching another woman. Yet she looked upon Kate as hardly worthy of her steel: what chance had this honest, hot-tempered, downright creature against so shrewd a pair as Terence and herself?
The present mild skirmish, for Kate was already aiming spiteful shafts at Terence, was a fair sample of the great battle to come. How different was Clancy's delicate rapier-play to Simon's clumsy hitting and slashing! He pretended a little heat at first, but soon began cunningly to laugh with Kate at himself; to blunt all her shafts before they were fairly sped; to guide her back to good temper by a touch here and a pull there, until her mirth took a genuine ring, and the only sort of reproach for which she had a mind was that of self.

"Admirable!" commented the widow; "it is a real pleasure to come across a man with a saving touch of woman's wit about him."

And so they rode along, emerging presently on to the broad, breezy moor, and in due time attaining their destination—a solitary farm perched upon the brink of the Culmer Vale. Here they left their horses; and the two men, having mounted their
rods and jumped hastily into their wading-gear, were soon striding down a steep path to the river, their brains filled with the angler's glorious lunacy to the exclusion of all else—past, present, or to come.
CHAPTER X.

The anglers found the water rather thick for the fly after late heavy rains, but the river was fining down rapidly, and by midday they had achieved just such moderate sport as serves to whet a fisherman's appetite. The luncheon-place had been chosen to suit the men's convenience; they would have no searching after romantic dells, wide prospects, or such-like irrelevances, but just had the hampers laid among the brake-fern, where the oak coppice came steeply down to hang over the great boulders of the river, and left the ladies to make the most of the situation. They
professed, indeed, to have no time for luncheon: Simon refused even to sit down, but stood, munching hastily, watching the water, and allowing the prattle of the ladies to float past him. Meanwhile he received their rebukes and chaff with the large good nature which distinguished him in all matters outside his particular fads.

"The special charm of all picnics," Mrs. French-Chichester observed, "lies in their atmosphere of reality: masks are laid aside, each sex shows in its true colours, and many hidden virtues come to light. There's the noble unselfishness of men, now—who would suspect its existence under more conventional circumstances? In drawing-rooms decency compels them to talk to us and pretend a little pleasure in our society, and we take it all as a matter of course. But out here they are free and untrammelled as the noble savage; here we are truly grateful for a single remark, knowing it to be purely
voluntary, since, hampers once unpacked, their duty is over. Yes, if they speak, it must be from sheer pleasure: think of that, my dears, and be ready with your gratitude, for Simon may yet open his lips at any moment almost!"

"A lady's sarcasm," said Simon, calmly perusing his fly-book, "is like some of my flies—very bright and natty, but not a bit killing. Terence, old boy, if Rush doesn't turn up soon I shall make a start up-stream."

In a few minutes, however, Captain Rush did put in an appearance, scrambling down through the oak coppice, while carefully supporting his father on his arm.

"Enter the tailor!" muttered Mrs. French-Chichester. "Shake out your creases, Kate; I'm beautifully posed already."

Kate's eyes looked gloomy; the sight of Mr. Clancy and her sister, seated side by side, seemed to give her little satisfaction.

"They make a pretty pair, too," laughed
the widow to herself, "but Kate has no sense of the picturesque!"

Old Squire Rush, as he was called, came forward timidly in his son's wake. He was a very gentle, retiring old man, with a stooping figure, and a little grey beard that seemed somehow to epitomize his personality—being thin, weak, straggling, and in need of constant caressing with his hand. He was a man who had borne his wealth so meekly that the world, for all its deep scorn of trade, had been content to punish him gently, even charitably to admit that twenty years of good country air and abstention from the shop had gone far towards eradicating the trade-taint in his blood. Ladies with marriageable daughters would nearly always lean to this kindly view, for, next to Sir Hamo Secretan's only son, Captain Rush was considered about the best parti in the neighbourhood. In fact, most mothers would have preferred Bick-
ington, with the Dragoon Guardsman, to Monks Damerel, saddled as it was with eccentric Simon and all his whimsies. The old squire, moreover, would be charmingly manageable. He led a harmless, pottering life at Bickington, having his green-houses for daily amusement, the anticipation of his son Julius's next visit for daily solace and comfort. Julius was the sun and centre of his existence. He had, it is true, a daughter some two years younger, but, having married a personage of great distinction, she found it difficult to give much attention to the ex-tailor, her father. Julius, however, was all-sufficing to the old squire, who considered him the best son, the cleverest man, and the finest gentleman in the three kingdoms. With Julius to back him, he would face even his own servants, upon whose attitude and conduct in general Captain Rush's home-coming had always a most beneficial effect.
While Julius was away soldiering, however—that is to say, during the greater part of the year—these servants of his took care that the old man should know his place, and keep to it. For the art of giving pain to inferior people is not confined to the upper classes; and the Squire of Bickington—whose long experience in this relation surely entitled him to form a definite opinion—at heart considered his butler, Mr. John Children, the hardest and most merciless of all his critics.

Never was conventional poor governess more systematically crushed by hard employer than was this old gentleman by the servants whom he only kept up for his son's sake. Indeed, upon one occasion the memory of his wrongs stirred up the gentle old squire almost to the point of rebuking a fellow-man. For he chanced one afternoon to travel back from Lymport in company with a worthy Socialist of the neigh-
bourhood, who entertained him with a long harangue against the cruelties of domestic servitude. Mr. Rush listened patiently, but with growing warmth. When they reached Chillington and parted, he raised his hat somewhat shakily, and murmured, in what he felt to be quite a savage way—

"Sir, I've heard you with interest; but if you was to come and spend a week with me in my home I think you'd learn a thing or two as you don't know at present. Excuse my plain speaking, but—but I don't mean anythink unkind. Good evening, sir."

After this he got into his carriage, feeling very warm, and perhaps a little proud of his courage, though compunction for his churlishness set in strongly some ten minutes afterwards.

But there was one person who gave Mr. Rush more pangs and woes even than McTavish, his head-gardener, or Children, his butler, and this was Miss Tredethlyn; to
please whom, as being the lady of his son's choice, was at once a sacred duty and a task beyond the utmost stretch of his powers. He was consumed by a never-satisfied yearning to ingratiate himself with Kate: meek with other people, he was abjectly humble with her, and failed in his end accordingly. No trouble taken in his son's interest was too great; he would read fashionable newspapers in order to brace himself up to Kate's level, wade through magazines and novels without end, so as to be better equipped for pleasing her.

Miss Tredethlyn, in her present ruffled mood, received the father and son with as much ungraciousness as could well be compassed at short notice. Poor Mr. Rush found all his little proffered topics, conned over so anxiously during the long moorland drive, rejected curtly. His simple face became filled with doubt and perplexity; noting which, a grimness came over his son Julius.
Nor did the latter escape Kate’s criticism. She began with his appearance. To her scrutinizing eye he was all wrong, from crown of deerstalker hat to sole of fishing brogues. He was too smart, too well-dressed; there was too much of Hounslow gloss about him to suit present surroundings. “He daren’t drop the dragoon for a moment lest the tailor should peep out,” commented Kate the fastidious. Had he put on a shabby coat she would have blamed his affectation.

While his father continued to flutter anxiously about Miss Tredethlyn, fetching and carrying for her like a little dog, Captain Rush made quiet cynical remarks to Mrs. French-Chichester. He was not an emotional man, nor by any means given to carrying his feelings on his sleeve, but he was mentally scoring down black marks against the woman he admired. If ever he conquered Kate Tredethlyn, he vowed
solemnly she should go under the Caudine Forks.

Nell was ashamed of her sister. She exerted herself to draw off Squire Rush, who struggled feebly between duty towards Kate and inclination towards herself, and was kind to the old man. Seeing that Kate was in her worst mood, she walked him off along the river bank, plucked rare ferns for him, and charmed his simple old heart with her caressing ways. "Ah, if that terrible sister were but like her!" muttered the old squire with a sigh.

Kate, however, was not the only person who betrayed annoyance at the advent of these people, for Terence, hating to lose sight of Nell for a moment to-day, felt jealous even of the old man. Simon had started up-stream after greeting the new arrivals, and was safely got rid of for a space —only to leave Nell in the hands of this pottering old bore.
Taking up his rod and basket, Terence presently prepared for a start, while Kate and Captain Rush appeared to be watching him suspiciously. Perfectly aware of their espionage, and inwardly fuming thereat, he headed down-stream, as if with the intention of following Nell and the old man, then, before he had gone many yards, stepped into a shallow and waded outwards into the full sweep of the river. Kate breathed a sigh of relief as the rod began to sway rhythmically and the fisherman warmed to his work. She cast a glance at the soldier, but, without even looking at her, he also took up his rod and departed.

"Now, isn't your rudeness justly punished, my dear?" asked Mrs. French-Chichester, mournfully. "Here we are left stranded, you see! Nothing left us now but feminine chatter and the contemplation of empty bottles. Hah! what was that?"

There was a loud splash about fifty yards
down stream, followed by a muttered "hurroo!" from Clancy. A great silver fish, much too heavy for a peal, had leaped clean out of the water and fallen back. The two ladies scrambled over the rocks in hot haste, for salmon were few and far between on the Culmer.

"Keep down, for mercy's sake," cried the fisherman, "or you'll scare his life out!"

Then he looked anxiously up and down the water. Above him all was plain sailing, with one large pool opening into another, but below was a boiling rapid studded with jagged rocks, down which it would be difficult enough to follow a hooked fish.

"I'll try him with a big Jock Scott," he whispered to the ladies, who were crouching behind a boulder; "no chance of killing a twenty-pounder like that on a small hook, and with all this rough water about."

He then proceeded to cast with the utmost wariness, lengthening his line out until the
fly swirled right over the spot where the big fish lay. It was a great moment for a man who had killed many trout, but never a salmon; every nerve quivered as his bright-hued lure swept round. But no boil came, no glorious jar to the tense nerves—the big fish refused to stir. He reeled up with a shaking hand and waded cautiously ashore.

"I must give him a rest," he muttered, "then try him with a smaller fly."

He lighted his pipe, and spread out his flies on a flat rock. Kate, quite familiar with the flies most favoured in these parts, discussed them with him. They talked together most amicably; for the immediate prospect of "killing something," or seeing it killed, will soothe even English spleen.

After a pause, the angler waded in once more to try a small dark fly of Kate's recommendation.

Again the rhythmic sway of the tapering greenheart; again the lengthening process.
He was casting a long line, and was too nervous to do his best, but the water was broken enough to cover bungles; the fly came over the right spot at last, and this time there was a boiling heave that sent his heart into his mouth. Should he strike? Before he could settle the question the reel was screaming, the fish rushing swiftly upstream. Terence tingled with excitement, yet the joy of the moment was laced with deep anxiety. The grand fish leaped thrice into the air. Horrible thought—was he off? No, another fine rush; then perfect stillness—a dead sulk. The angler had time to wipe his dripping forehead.

At this period of the struggle Nell joined the other ladies, having left Squire Rush to accompany his son and witness his prowess. All three watched breathlessly for the salmon's next move.

"I daren't leave him to rub the hook out at his leisure," said Terence, ruefully. "I
must put a strain on, though, bedad, my heart's heavy and my tackle light. Miss Tredethlyn, would you kindly throw a few stones in just below him, for if he heads down, I'm done for."

The slight rod was bent into a hoop. The suspense had become painful, when suddenly the fish moved, sailed off quietly at first, then bolted furiously down stream, Terence splashing through the shallows in headlong chase.

The situation was now a shade too piquant for pure pleasure, for the river narrowed and deepened, and a low wall, which here followed the left bank, forced the angler to follow in the water, or not at all.

Already he had plumped into one or two holes, and his wading stockings were full of water; worse still, his line was nearly run out. Should he hold hard, or follow further? Kate saw that he was hesitating, and shouted that he could never keep his legs in
the next rapid, which was known for a dangerous place. But he must needs venture another yard or two.

The water took him up to the elbows, the heavy waders clogged his movements. A few seconds more and the vehement river had him in its grip, whirling him furiously along, buffeting him against rocks and boulders at its will.

Kate followed him down, calling loudly for help. In a moment or two she heard, to her inexpressible relief, the crashing of boughs, and Simon leaped down from the oak coppice on her left. From a high rock some distance up-stream he had perceived Terence to be fast in a fish, and had immediately started off, gaff in hand.

“But as it is we shall have to gaff the fisherman, Kate,” he gasped, panting for breath. “Keep up your pecker, old boy!” he shouted; “you’ll be in the pool directly, and I’ll fish you out, sure enough!”
Fortunately the fierce rapid was a short one. Very soon Terence was hurled by it into the pool below, disappearing for a moment or two under the white water at its head. Simon tore off his coat, then waited a moment, watching keenly. He perceived that Terence was nearly spent, and, being now about the centre of the wide pool, and between its two strong backwaters, might be sucked into either. If he were driven under the opposite bank it would be better to gain it through the shallow at the pool’s foot and chase him along it; if not—— But no further weighing of the question was needed. Terence drifted into the near backwater, and as Kate uttered an exclamation of relief, Simon plunged in.

For a moment or two Kate’s heart was in her mouth; she felt that if Terence were once more driven under the white water, there would be nothing but his dead body to recover. But Simon was cool, prompt,
and a powerful swimmer. He seized his friend just before the hungry back-wash had gripped him fairly, wrestled strongly with it for a moment or two, then found himself on a sudden in dead water. The rest was simple; he quickly touched bottom, waded a few steps, then took up his burden like a baby and tramped calmly through the remaining shallow water.

Terence was bruised and scared, but had not lost consciousness. He was still clutching his rod, and in want of nothing but rest and a little brandy. Seeing which, Simon handed his flask to Kate, and finding the fish, which had been deeply and firmly hooked, still fast, proceeded to play it as though nothing had happened.

Kate admired his calm way of taking things. She had before noticed that anything in the shape of real danger tended to make Simon cheerful and happy, though almost any trifle in the way of ordinary life,
if it happened to cross the vein of his prejudice, would serve to perturb and depress him. "He's an odd fellow," thought she, "and I don't believe Nell understands him even as well as I do."

Kate and Mrs. French-Chichester soon succeeded in reviving Terence sufficiently to be able to help him on his feet. He took a shaky step or two, but his nerves were still unstrung.

"Bravo, Terence! Look sharp and pull yourself together, for your fish is giving in—and land him you must!" shouted Simon from a gravelly point at the lower end of the pool.

Terence tottered off, his eye brightening.

"Simon's a perfect barbarian!" Mrs. French-Chichester muttered angrily.

Kate made no remark, but watched Simon put the rod into his friend's hand, standing ready to support him if necessary, then stoop down, gaff the big fish, and lay it gasping on the gravel.
"There, that's your first salmon, old man; have another pull at the brandy-flask and drink his health. That's all right, and now I'm going to hale you off to the farm for a change of clothes."

There was a gleam of enthusiasm in Kate's eyes.

"Look at him," quoth she; "strong, capable, cool as a cucumber; with a man's power and a woman's tenderness—what an odd, fine, whimsical old Simon it is!"

"He concerned himself a deal more about the fish than about his friend," muttered Simon's cousin.

"By the way, what have you done with Nell?"

Nell came towards them as her sister spoke. She had a curious, dazed look, and was deadly pale. When they asked her a question she burst into hysterical tears and laughter.

"What, another candidate for the brandy-
flask?" the widow exclaimed. "Come, child, Simon's all right; you were scared at seeing him plunge in, no doubt?"

"I hope so," mused Kate, turning aside as though averse to meeting her sister's eye, "I hope so with all my heart!" Then she looked round again, saying sharply, "No nonsense, Nell. I won't have it. Fancy your pretending to hysterics?"

"Aha!" thought the widow, "you'll give your sister a bit of your mind to-night, Kate, my dear. You would like to begin now at once, wouldn't you? But, beware lest that tongue of yours bring about your own defeat!"

Simon soon strolled down from the farm again, attired in a carter's smock and corduroy trousers, and bearing an immense black kettle.

They greeted him with shouts of laughter, in which he joined with the zest of a schoolboy.
"Terence is too vain to appear in this get-up," he explained; "but I like it. He'll be here soon, so I hope you'll have some tea ready. There's lots of dry brake-fern about for firewood; and I'm afraid you two must pick it up, for I have no time, and Kate's proud spirit would revolt from such menial work." With that, Simon took up his rod, and walked thigh-deep into the pool, much to the detriment of his corduroys.

By the time Terence appeared the kettle was boiling among the rocks at the head of the pool, while Squire Rush and his son busied themselves under Nell's superintendence. Captain Rush had landed two good peal, which the old gentleman proudly displayed to each of the ladies in succession, and would hardly allow out of his sight for a moment. Simon was still flogging away, blowing clouds of tobacco smoke, and wading about with the skirts of his smock swaying gracefully in the stream.
Mr. Clancy was effusively greeted by the ladies. They surrounded him with eager hopes, pityings, and kindly upbraidings. How could he so endanger his life for the sake of a mere fish? How rashly he had ventured into the rapid; how gallantly he had clung to his rod! Was he unconscious when Simon first caught him?

Terence stood laughing and blushing, and enjoying not a little the importance and interest wherewith the ducking had invested him. While Mrs. French-Chichester poured out sympathy, Nell's lips were silent, but her eyes were eloquent.

Meanwhile the dragoon regarded this sentimental scene with a cynical glance. He felt oddly jealous for his friend, and perhaps a little for himself. Why should Clancy be fussed over and caressed like this? why, the man was undermining Simon, supplanting him with his friends. Even Sir Hamo seemed to care more for this
semi-stranger than for his own son. "What is Clancy's game?" He had caught himself asking this question more than once lately, and could in no wise answer it to his satisfaction. He felt a vague distrust of the man, yet had nothing beyond intuitive prejudice to found it upon.

Nell was soon in high spirits again, running over with talk and laughter. Rush, the sardonic, found himself obliged to laugh with the others, and the sliding Culmer joined its music to the merriment of the party. Before they broke up their camp the broad sun had gone behind the western moors, and the pool at their feet was giving back the delicate rose and opal of a placid evening sky.

The ride home that evening was an epoch that made a deep mark in the memory of both Nell and Terence. His exaltation reached a climax none the less poignant from having to be suppressed; for he saw
in Nell's eyes what he had hitherto looked for in vain, what he had striven with anxious, patient subtlety to put there, all the while keeping rigidly to the fiction of strict loyalty to his friend. He had made love to Nell without a spoken word, pacifying his flexible conscience with the sophistry that comes so easily to a well-meaning, semi-false nature. He was now in a whirl of triumph. True, there were still some points of difference to be settled with his better self, some jagged fragments of good resolutions rasping him, some underlining of shame to his satisfaction; but for the moment these things could be thrust aside, and he could give his joy full rein.

They were all riding home in a confused group, so that there was nothing to alarm Nell, nothing to sting her loyalty into quickened life. She felt like one in a dream; for in giving her an honest, pure soul, nature had laid her fatally open to
such an attack as Terence Clancy's. Even now she remained unenlightened: for the present she was only aware of some strange uplifting of her nature, of an increased joy in the liquid beauty of the sky, in the stealing of grey mists up wooded combes, and the large peacefulness of the moor—quiet as though soothed to rest by its Maker's own voice and hand. She could only listen to her thoughts, she had no power to analyze them: it seemed as though her heart had gone out of her keeping, and were beating in the broad bosom of nature.

When they entered the green twilight of the woods Terence fell behind with her some little distance. She scarcely heard his words, but his voice fell warm upon her heart, his every glance was a caress. She had forgotten the others, and Terence, filled with reckless exaltation, was hardly master of himself.

Yet it needed but a touch to restore
them both to sanity, and Simon himself supplied it.

At a bend in the bridle path they found him awaiting them, and he at once drew Terence aside, whispering eagerly—

"Canter on, old fellow, and give me an innings, for I have something special to say to Nell."

With anger and bitter jealousy Terence shook his friend's hand from his shoulder and rode on, cursing Simon, and his own miserable fate, and the sickening conventions of the world. He knew well enough what the lover had to say: no leap so quick and sure as that of jealous intuition.

"He seems a bit put out," Simon remarked simply. "I hope you have not been quarrelling with him, dear? You must leave that to Kate, you know."

Nell could not trust herself to speak; she was shaking like a leaf, could hardly retain her seat in the saddle. The truth had come
to her with the sound of her lover's voice, the scales had fallen suddenly from her eyes.

Simon, looking shyly away from her into the dusk, and himself not a little perturbed by the task before him, noticed nothing. When he turned, his honest eyes were bent upon her with a look which seemed to immerse her in a hot wave of shame. He had for some time been trying to screw up his courage to the point of preferring a certain request, and had now made up his mind to the plunge so suddenly as to take his own breath away. Yet, perhaps, few lovers could have asked the old old question in a way better calculated to please a woman, had she cared to hear it asked at all. Nell would never forget the simple eloquence which so deepened her shame.

"And how long, my love," he concluded—"how long must I wait? You care for me a little—it won't be so very hard to leave your home for mine?"
Silence, not a whisper; the hushed woods seemed to listen, but no sound came.

Hitherto, when he had spoken of love, it had been in a tongue strange to Nell; spoken passion being a dead thing to a passionless listener, she had always been able to answer him calmly, without any acute sense of the flatness of her own words; but now an abler tutor than Simon had taught her the meaning of heart-language. No commonplace answer would come now: she was dumb.

Simon was deeply hurt. A draught of chill air seemed to pass into his mind. Nell had been moody and capricious with him at times, had taxed his faculty of accusing himself in order to palliate her faults; but this wounding silence was a thing to cut deeper. It was the first sting of the adder which he had been nursing, the first stroke of the lash his bosom friend had prepared for his back.
But Simon's faith was still sound and healthy, not a sickly, puling thing to have its life tweaked out by the first pinch of disappointment. He had none of the facility of disbelief that belongs to the animal, Othello-type of man; and in relation to Nell long habit had kept his expectation tuned low, making ready deference to her feeling a first instinct. Even so, however, the tone of his voice, when he spoke again, fell strangely upon Nell's ears.

"I've sprung it upon you," he said. "I've been over-hasty, as usual. Don't vex yourself about it to-night: take a week or two for consideration. I would not for worlds harass you about it. Come, Nell, let us ride on and join the others."
IMON SECRETAN and his host were unusually silent over their dinner that night. Each exerted himself spasmodically to contribute a little hilarity to the evening, but the failure of either was about equally conspicuous. Simon was vaguely depressed at Nell's cold reception of his entreaty, though as yet not seriously anxious about it. After the first disappointment, the habit of idealizing the woman he loved, of regarding her as above and beyond all criticism, of finding in himself the fault, if at any time she fell short of his expectations, had reasserted itself.
As regards Nell, his critical faculty had positively suffered atrophy from disuse; he had fallen into that fatal obtuseness which is the natural outcome of over-intensity in any passion. As for suspecting his friend, of conceiving him capable of treacherous hankerings after Nell, his mind was not capable of forming the idea, much less of giving it harbourage.

Terence, with his feminine intuitiveness and quick-probing sympathy, had no difficulty in reading his visitor's thoughts. He knew, as certainly as though Simon had described it, how Nell had rebuffed him; he knew that Simon was even now making reflections upon his own clumsiness and want of tact, that nothing short of brutal frankness on the part of some one or other would ever waken him to the truth.

His friend's blind unsuspicion sat heavily upon Clancy's heart. Had Simon been as other men, Terence felt—the mood of re-
action being now strong upon him—that he could have confessed all and bowed to the storm. As it was, he felt half dazed with conflicting emotions; at one moment his heart went out to this large-natured Quixote who had loaded him with obligations, at the next he hated his benefactor.

The tangled situation in which he found himself was like a cage of red-hot iron, scorching him every time he moved. There were but two exit-doors available, two paths leading to restored self-respect:—he must either renounce Nell, now that she was almost won, which was quite impossible; or he must now, this very night, in place of completing the deed of assignment, renounce all Simon's gifts, and regain poverty and freedom at a stroke, which was all but impossible. For such wilful destruction of his own prospects would be a gross failure of duty to his family, by whom so much had been given up for Terence—the promising, the talented,
the future lifter-up of a whole batch of young brothers and sisters from the mire of destitution. For him the urchin-flock had gone half clothed and unschooled, for him the mother had pinched and starved, the father had foregone the small savings wrung from the miserable bog-lands of his holding; to send him to Rugby and St. Bartholomew's crabbed maiden aunts had been propitiated, and grumbling uncles dunned to the yielding point.

And now at length Terence was in a position to restore that poor hungry home-party to comparative comfort. It needed so little to effect this; they had been bred up in so hard a school that a tenth part of the income derivable from this practice would be a little stream of wealth to that sordid home in the depths of County Cork.

Terence's father was a silent, broken-down sort of man, and perhaps by reason of his little speaking, his parting words dwelt the
longer in his son's memory: "I know ye won't forget your mother and the little uns if ye ever make a big hit, Terence agrah, for 'tis a good heart ye have. But see that ye walk straight, me son, for ye've a bit of a weakness for tricksiness; play fair wid your friends, for ye'll make a crowd of them."

Then again, there was Nell herself to consider; could he desert her now after the innocent confession of her eyes and voice? Could he, after making happiness with her betrothed impossible—— He had to drop one train of thought after another like red-hot irons; finding which, he grew reckless, as a weak man much pressed by circumstances will always do. Sign his acceptance of Simon's gift he must, were it only for the sake of his family—for the rest, things must drift on as they would. His intentions had always been for the best; it was no fault of his that this strange affinity had drawn him and sweet Nell together.
To drown thought, and from sheer desire to warm his heart towards the friend whom the baser part of him was trying to regard as an enemy, Terence drank a good deal of wine. As the fumes mounted, his hopes brightened; he saw all difficulties smoothed by some happy accident; he saw Nell released from Simon by the latter's own wish, without breach of honour or even propriety, and the little romance ending in happy tears and noble speeches all round. By the time they rose from the table he had drunk twice as much as usual, and his excited feelings made him seem downright intoxicated.

Simon noticed this state of things with some disappointment. Yet as Terence warmed towards him, once more sentimentalized into a state at least coloured by old friendship, he blamed his own hard judgment. He felt drawn by the very weakness of his friend, stirred, as often before, by that protecting kind of affection which a
strong father has for a feeble son. "I must look after old Terence," he mused. "He only needs a little stiffening to be the best fellow alive. He shall never go astray for want of a friend, anyway."

"I think it is about time to go and meet Dr. Rose, and put the finishing touch to the legal business," he said aloud, hoping to sober Terence and check further hospitality.

"Then come on, old chap," cried the other, taking Simon's arm to steady himself. "Come on, and I'll sign any d—d thing you please. You've dragged me out of a morass of poverty: I'm a free man, I say, ready to meet my enemies in the gate with a high heart and a swelled purse! I don't care a d—n for any one, old fellow. Simon, I love you again; I've been a cursed low mean fellow lately—never mind in what way; 'tis a relief to tell you the bare fact. Will you bear with me, old chap, and forgive me? God knows I wouldn't hurt a hair of your
head! And you saved my life to-day, dear old lad; I was clean spent when you took me by the collar—couldn't have supported myself another two seconds."

"Come, Terence, you're talking wildly; pull yourself together, or we must put off this business. You are over-excited, and too—"

"Too full of liquor, you might say, Simon; yet 'tisn't that altogether, 'tis intoxicated with returning self-respect I am. Ah, you don't know me, old fellow; I've been playing the part of a sneak and a cur lately—but never again, never again! You work upon me somehow without being aware of it, and now I'm a man again. Shake hands with me, now, and tell me I'm no cur?"

He finished with a half-sob, and Simon was lost in wonderment at this outburst. Yet Terence's eager desire to be friendly was plain enough, nor was it in Simon's nature to fail in answering warmth. He
held out his hand without a word, letting his face speak for him; and they walked off together like brothers, with linked arms, to put the finishing touch to Simon's latest experiment in philanthropy.
CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT the time Simon and Terence reached the lawyer's office, Kate Tredethlyn was for the first time in her life retiring to rest without saying good night to her sister. There had been coolnesses between them, following naturally upon periods of heat, yet never until now a quarrel of pith enough to endure over bedtime. Nor had they quarrelled openly now. Indeed, Nell seemed too dazed and bewildered to be quite aware of her sister's exasperation. Ordinarily she would have rushed to her father the moment she was off her horse, and have poured forth a vivid account of the day's
adventures. To-night she was silent as a mouse.

"What! my vigorous little Nell tired out with a gallop over the moor?" laughed the comfortable parson. He turned to Kate for an explanation of the phenomenon, but perceived at once that he would get none. Her brow was dark, her eyes sullen; her mood of a stormy type, well calculated to hinder the digestive process of a quiet man who has lately dined well, and incline him towards tobacco and the seclusion of his study.

Mr. Tredethlyn had always been rather afraid of his tall, handsome daughter, and was often conscious of a certain boyish elation when she was away on a visit, or for a day's picnicking. To-day, for example, had been full of peace and careless ease. When the girls rode off with Simon, their father was free to sit undisturbed among his roses, tranquilly reading the Guardian; after which he had been gently busy pasting
some photographs of the Chilling Vale into an album. Luncheon, again, had to-day been invested with an atmosphere of pleasing bachelor-like repose, and his cook had surpassed herself in the matter of mutton cutlets—a weak point with her when she chanced to be out of temper. In fact, having no exacting Miss Kate to satisfy, she had been able to give the full force of her mind to these cutlets, and master's gratification had been a full return for her pains.

After lunch Mr. Tredethlyn had driven into Chillington, and spent a couple of comfortable gossipy hours at the club; nor could even Kate, whose silent criticism he often found so prickly, accuse her father of idleness to-day, for had he not voluntarily called upon the overworked vicar, and undertaken the post of chairman at an approaching parish meeting? Mr. Tredethlyn was a popular man; liked, as one who never interfered with his neighbours; respected, as one
who never did more work than he could help. It was as much a pleasure to himself as to his audience when he addressed the good folks of the town, for he was a good speaker, and his rich, genial voice and sly humour were full of good-living, good-nature, and wholesome human kindness.

He had proposed gaining a little credit with Kate by thus stepping in to relieve Mr. Nelson of a duty; but it was clear that nothing could please her to-night, that no recognition of his energy would be wrung from her by any means whatever: in brief, the one thing to do was to get out of her way.

"Better not sit talking with the girls this time," thought the sly parson; "but—let me see, Nell can stand my strong Havannahs better than Kate; suppose I were to thicken the atmosphere of the study just up to Nell's power of endurance, and so secure myself against her sister? A well-smoked study is
at once an entrenched camp unassailable by woman, and a hospital for the cure of nerves ravaged by past skirmishing with her. I shall smoke faster than they can eat, for better no Nell than both Kate and Nell."

Nell drifted into the entrenched camp presently, still drooping, languid, and quite unlike herself. She had been upstairs to change her dress, yet was still in her riding-habit; her dark eyes had lost their sparkle, her ordinary brightness was quenched. But Mr. Tredethlyn failed to notice anything, having a full share of the self-concentration of his sex; to gain whose ear one needs not only to be very ill, but to proclaim the fact at the top of one's voice.

"Come and sit by me, little girl. You don't mind the smoke? Kate could hardly endure this atmosphere, I think—and hope," he added with an inward chuckle.

"No, I don't mind the smoke, father."

"Well, you've had a pleasant day, of
course, little Nell? How has our excellent, but too vigorous, Simon been spending his energies? Any new philanthropy afoot? I really believe that he and the vicar do a deal of harm between them, the place seems to be growing more discontented every day. However, Lord Timon, as his cousin calls him, is a fine fellow, dear; and, some day, I must e'en try to live up to my son-in-law. Was Terence Clancy with you this afternoon? I must get him to ride over again in a day or two, for I'm not as well as I could wish. Dyspepsia, you know, undermines every pleasure. I do assure you that I'm so languid as to be unequal to the least exertion; why, the mere drive into the town quite tired me—and I made a poor luncheon, too. You young people, with never an ache or a care beyond your twopenny sentimental troubles, don't know what a painful process life can be!"

And so the good-natured, selfish father
prosed on, while Nell sat, buried deep in an armchair, trying hard to listen, but finding every word drowned by the noise of her own thoughts.

Meanwhile, Kate had been crossing swords, or rather tongues, with two of the maids; but with little gain of relief from the process, since one gave her a month’s warning on the spot, and the other was only waiting to follow suit as soon as the first flood of hysteria should abate. Later on she retired for the night without attempting an attack upon the study, more harassed in mind and temper than she had been for a long time.

It was a hot night, and she felt quite unable to sleep, indeed hardly made an effort to do so, having quite set her mind upon a visit from Nell. She felt that her sister’s present stunned condition could not last many hours, that a torpid state so unnatural to Nell must needs end in a storm. Kate was eager for the storm; she had determined
upon strong measures, and the more tempest the better.

The clock in the passage had struck the hours up to three o'clock, and now it was getting close upon four, but Kate never swerved from her expectant attitude. Neil would come; she felt as certain of it as that the sun would rise. And sure enough, just before the clock struck again, there was a pattering step in the passage, and Nell stole into the room.

"Are you awake, Kate?"

"Yes, wide awake."

Both voices were charged with the vague something that precludes any preliminary commonplaces; with both it was a case of silence or a plunge.

Nell sat down, with a heavy sigh, by the window. The stealing half-light of the coming dawn fell upon the black shower of her hair and the white folds of her long dressing-wrapper. Kate, sitting up in bed,
awaiting with quickened pulse the coming outburst, felt rather than saw what was in her sister's face.

"I believe I am the most miserable woman in the world!" Hardly had Nell got the words out when she burst into a storm of sobs and tears.

"I'm glad you've come to your senses at last, Nell; and you may cry as hard as you please, for I'm a deal too angry to waste pity on you—in fact, I rather want to see you have a bad time than not."

"I don't want your pity; I'm too wretched for that to do any good, and I hate myself too much to accept pity from any one. Oh, Kate, I did think I was honest and true, if nothing else—it is a bitter thing to find one's self out to be such a poor creature, so fickle, so contemptible, so false. False, do you hear? I wouldn't have accused myself of that in my humblest mood. I did think I could trust myself—that I had the humble virtue
of faithfulness. I don't know how this thing has come upon me; I have felt only dull and languid lately, but there has been a slow fever creeping through me, and now——"

"Now you've found yourself out to be mortal," said Kate, moodily, "and so liable to fever. It is not an uncommon discovery."

"Oh, I never knew, I never dreamt," cried Nell, blushing crimson and hiding her face. "I never dreamt until to-day that I was false; yet when they were struggling in the water, I don't believe I gave Simon a thought. I have neither honour, nor loyalty, nor truth. Do you hear?"

"I am now certain of what I have often suspected"—Kate spoke with knitted brows and a kind of gloomy satisfaction—"namely, that Terence Clancy is no true man. He has meanly and cleverly taken advantage of your harassed state with regard to Simon. And I suppose a woman is weaker to resist an attack by one man, while vainly trying
to love another, than under any other conditions. Had you broken with Simon, as I wished and advised; had you been free and happy, with the full use of your eyesight, I don't believe you would ever have looked twice at this too-modest, too-kind, too-subtle, too-treacherous—"

"You're utterly unjust to him, Kate. He is perfectly innocent; he has not the slightest suspicion of my weakness; he is simply a kind friend. You don't know him—oh, you don't know him; he's the very soul of honour!"

"Then honour's a poorer thing than I've been brought up to suppose. I'll tell you what I do think about him: he's a man of excellent intentions, soft heart, and double nature—the sort of man who does better as an instrument for spoiling another's happiness than any downright scoundrel. I say Terence is a good-hearted shuffler, a kind of innocent sneak—"
“Never dare to mention his name again!” Nell burst forth, white with anger. “Never dare to traduce an honourable man in order to cover my weakness. If you mention him again, I leave the room!”

“I wouldn’t indulge in heroics, Nell; they don’t come well from one who proposes to become Mrs. Clancy, and to commence housekeeping on an income furnished by the man she has jilted.”

Nell, who had been walking to and fro since the first mention of Clancy’s name, sank down again with a gasp.

“Do you think I have sunk so low as that? You hit me hard, Kate. You don’t spare me!”

“That was a brutal speech of mine. I’m sorry, little Nell.”

“Never mind,” said Nell, in a crushed sort of way; “I’ve given you the right to trample on me, and nothing matters much now.”
"You really care for this man? The disease has struck root?"

"Care for him? Had honour permitted I could have been happy with him in the meanest cottage. I could——"

"There, there," cried the other fretfully; "for Heaven's sake let us stop at the cottage! Why can no one ever talk of love without dragging in that wretched Thatched Thing? I'm sick to death of it. Drop that mawkish stuff and answer this question—What do you intend to do?"

"You insult me by asking."

"Then I don't see how the conversation's to go on. I mustn't mention this spotless Irishman's name, and I mustn't ask you a question. It's hardly worth while keeping you out of bed to talk about the weather, is it?"

"Don't you know me well enough to guess my intention, Kate?"

"'Tis something Quixotic, my dear,
without doubt—something rather insane and desperately thorough, if I know you at all. You and Simon are lunatics both, or you'd have been comfortably married long ago. Are you going for a governess or a pupil-teacher after first telling Simon that, though you don't care the flick of a whip for him except as a sister, you'll gush out with friendship for him as long as he lives, and nurse his children when another woman has made him happy? That's the usual or regulation treatment of the case, I believe."

"It's not the treatment suggested by common decency or rectitude, to my mind."

"Then out with your plan, my dear; don't fear to alarm me. The most gorgeous scheme coming from you won't dazzle me. Fling a rainbow at me and I shan't wink!"

"My plan is simple enough, Kate. I intend to keep my word. I'm pledged to Simon, and shall marry him as soon as he pleases."
"And how about the other hero of the piece—the one who is 'the soul of honour,' etc.?"

Nell threw back her answer with flash of eye and an angry gesture.

"I shall avoid him; I shall never see him, if I can possibly help it. Should he guess my weakness he would know how to assist me."

"I see."

"Would that I could trust myself as absolutely as I can him!"

"Just so."

"Kate, Kate, I'm very miserable; don't be hard with me. Do tell me that you think me capable of doing my duty to poor old Simon, and keeping this wretched secret to myself?"

"My dear child, I think you capable of anything, except what is commonplace, or sensible, or mean. But why not adopt some middle course? Let your engagement come
to an end, then let us go abroad with one of the aunts, and stay there until both aspirants have cooled down and forgotten you? The thing's possible, I do assure you. As somebody in Shakespeare says:—

"Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love."

"Middle course? In questions of honour there's no such thing."

"There, there; you crush me with your aphorisms. I'm not going to beat the air any more; I'm not going to try and quench a conflagration of sentiment with a penny squirt of common sense. Come in here beside me, little Nell, and stay till getting-up time. We'll talk no more and quarrel no more. You'll just go your own way in this matter; I shall sneer a little behind your back now and then, and work off the rest of my temper on my father or the servants. I hate quarrelling with you, for you always
apologize for my faults afterwards, and make me feel so abominably mean. Come into bed at once, or you’ll catch your death of cold and get laid up, and then I shall have to nurse and be kind to you and bottle up my wrath, instead of giving you the shaking you deserve.”
CHAPTER XIII.

Kate and her fatherbreakfasted togethernext morning, Nell having caught aslight chill at the picnic yesterday, as hersister explained, and being in bed with a headache in consequence. There was an odour of improbability about this statement; but Kate had no inventive skill worth mentioning, and it served her purpose well enough, since Mr. Tredethlyn was himselfan invalid this morning, with mind fully occupied by his own woes. He hadexerted himself a good deal in the garden yesterday, and so got over-heated, and the subsequent chill had flown to his liver.
Whether the extra glass or two of Madeira with which he had celebrated his bachelor holiday had increased the chill was a point for private reflection. At any rate, the deep gloom of torpid liver was upon him, and breakfast a mere empty form. He thrust aside his untasted salmon-peal, packed for him with especial care by Nell the moment it left its native Culmer yesterday, and sighed the deep sigh of the dyspeptic.

"Kate, my dear, I feel wretchedly unwell this morning. I believe I shall have to send for that bright fellow Terence Clancy again."

Her father's distempers always produced a contemptuous irritation in Kate; but the threat to summon Terence was at this juncture a positive outrage.

"I do wish, father"—she tried to steady her voice, but the temper would get into it—"I do wish you would put yourself into the hands of some other doctor. Are you so very unwell this morning?"
This was a bad stroke. Nothing could have been better calculated to arouse his opposition than this simple question; for even a good-natured parson is not to be managed by scoffing at his bodily trials. The genial ruddy face became sullen; its owner relapsed into silence.

"I do not believe he is more skilful than the other doctors; and—and you would really do me a great favour by going back to doctor Rose?"

"He is leaving off practice—as you know perfectly well. I suppose you would like me to do without medical attendance altogether?"

"Why not try Mr. Syme? People are beginning to think better of him, I hear."

No answer. Her father had assumed the dignified silence of injured innocence. Kate's indifference to his state of health was a grievance of long standing.

She quickly regretted her want of self-control. It was of real importance to keep
Terence out of the house for a time. Already, as she had been duly informed, some of the gossips of Chillington had been coupling his name with her sister's, and the report gave a deep stab to her family pride. She had vexed her father now, and must give up the topic for an hour or two; but she was resolved to recur to it again and again, to fight tooth and nail to keep Nell's name from slander.

A long silence ensued; then both were relieved by the appearance of Mrs. French-Chichester driving rapidly round the sweep in her high dog-cart. Kate hastened to the French window to greet the welcome visitor. Mr. Tredethlyn's smile broke out again as the widow nodded her cheerful good mornings.

Mrs. French-Chichester was in her brightest mood; she seemed to disperse the sullen atmosphere of the room as a breeze the moorland fog.
"What! no little Nell?" she exclaimed as she sat down. "What does this mean?"

"She is in bed with a bad headache."
The widow smiled at Kate's crude simplicity, muttering, "Her very voice shows that something is wrong."

"Tut, tut, child!" cried the visitor, arranging her fringe with coquettish glances at the looking-glass, in which Kate's face was also reflected. "Nell with the megrims? I never heard of such a thing. Send up my love, and tell her she must come down immediately."

"I think she caught a chill yesterday."

"Kate, Kate, you can't do it!" laughed the widow inwardly. "Chill and headache, indeed? I could have thought of something better at ten years old!"

"These girls don't know what headache means," sighed Mr. Tredethlyn. "When they come to our age, now——"

"Oh, how dare you, Mr. Tredethlyn?"
"I beg your pardon—I meant my age. As for you, I only wish they were half as young."

"Thank you; that's very pretty. Well, Nell's headache must be cured by to-night, or I shall scold her dreadfully."

"She'll be well enough if there's any fun going forward," laughed the large parson, sinking back in an armchair. "These girls are full of whims and fancies. Now, I wonder if you could make a guess at Kate's last fad?"

"I haven't a notion. Has she discovered a flaw in some bosom friend's pedigree, and so been compelled to cut her acquaintance?"

"Why, she has taken a sudden dislike to your protégé, Terence Clancy, and wants me to drop him."

The widow's pale quick eyes fell; fearing to betray herself, she turned to the glass again. Poor Kate! It was too naively delicious to hear her father bawling out the
family secret thus! There was Kate, crimson with vexation, making signs to him, while he poured out Terence’s praises, intermixed with appeals to the visitor for corroboration.

"Never dare to disparage my 'pretty boy' Terence again," cried the widow, after superadding her praises to those of Mr. Tredethlyn. "Never hint at such a thing," she insisted, shaking her head at Kate, and showing her gleaming teeth, "or I shall believe you are in love with him!"

Poor Kate, with her hands tied by the dread of exposing Nell, was quite beaten flat between the pair.

"And now that I’ve scolded you well, my dear," the lively woman resumed, "I’m going to turn suppliant, and entreat your assistance to-night. I have three new men staying with me unexpectedly—two hussar cousins and a fast young barrister, and amuse them I must by hook or by crook."
Besides, I have boasted so much about the belles of our neighbourhood that, merely to preserve my credit, you and Nell must come and dine to-night. I've got a few people together at a moment's notice, so pray don't make difficulties. And I have asked Simon (the speaker forgot to mention that he had refused), "and Captain Rush, and the Bulteel girls, and a few others."

Kate hesitated.

"Your pet aversion, my 'pretty boy,' hasn't been asked, so don't be alarmed."

Kate accepted forthwith, with a sigh of relief. The visitor enjoyed another inward laugh. But straightforward Kate was presently to deal her shrewd adversary a facer calculated to astonish her not a little. Just as her visitor rose to go, she exclaimed quite simply, as though innocent of giving any but the best news—

"By-the-by, father, I have a strong impression that we shall lose Nell rather sooner
than we have anticipated. Simon is to ride over after lunch, and I verily believe they intend to discuss no less a question than the wedding-day."

Kate was quite proud of the matter-of-course way in which she delivered this; not a soul, she considered, could possibly suspect her of any special anxiety on Nell's behalf.

Mrs. French-Chichester winced under the stroke for one moment, but recovered herself the next. She guessed precisely what had happened, and that there was a likelihood of Terence's very success proving fatal. He had, in fact, won a dangerous victory, thereby exposing to Nell the state of her heart; and instead of surrendering as an ordinary rational girl would have done, she must needs turn heroic, and, like a British army, only begin to show her real mettle when well beaten. The shrewd critic felt that she had not allowed quite enough for
this same old-fashioned romanticism of Nell's; but if she had been taking things too easily lately, she saw her error clearly enough now, and fully meant to have her own way in spite of it. For her interests were nearly concerned in this question of Simon and Nell; and her will, once braced up to a given course, seldom failed to bend circumstances accordingly.

"I'm so glad you're here this morning," Kate continued, "for you'll join me in persuading my father to give Nell leave of absence. You, at any rate, will understand how absolutely necessary it will be for her to go up to Town about her trousseau as soon as the day is settled?"

"Gracious, child, you quite take my breath away! Do you mean to say that Simon has actually screwed himself up to the point of asking to have the great day fixed? I thought our Arcadian pair would have been billing away for at least another year before
that. Is there a brief lull in his schemes, or does he propose to turn Monks Damerel into, say a home for inebriates, and require Nell's services as head matron? Mr. Tredethlyn, what do you say to having your little Nell snatched away in this ruthless manner?"

Mr. Tredethlyn's looks answered for him; his ruddy face had actually paled at Kate's announcement. To lose Nell? He had not half made up his mind to such a sacrifice, for another year at least. Nell was a necessity of his existence, the very light of his eyes. His mingled horror and bewilderment caused the visitor to bubble over with laughter, in which Kate joined more from excitement than mirth.

"Come, come, Kate, how can you have the heart to throw an indulgent parent into such a state; you, who want to deprive him of his doctor, too? Really, this is a most unnatural and cynical age. Mr. Tredethlyn,
I must positively come to your rescue in this strait. We're not going to have Nell snatched away in this bandit fashion, are we? with a hole-and-corner wedding, and a jerry-built trosseau? No, no; our little beauty is not to be surrendered in this off-hand fashion. We must have due notice—six months at least, I should stand out for—and then a grand wedding with proper alarums and excursions. You must put your foot down for once, and I'll support you through thick and thin. I shall manage to talk over Nell to-night, and ensure you some reprieve. Meanwhile, let Simon start a lunatic asylum to keep himself quiet. Well, I really must be off now, as poor Miss Sherringham will be looking for me. Six months, mind—and no surrender!"

In two minutes Mrs. French-Chichester was rattling down the drive, and had disappeared round the corner of the laurels.

She drove straight to the house of Miss
Sherringham, an invalid friend who lived in the town. She was generally understood to be very kind and attentive to this old friend, and thus earned a good deal of praise on rather slight grounds. To-day's visit was brief and characteristic; that is to say, she rattled away for some ten minutes, hardly allowing the invalid to get in a word. She was dreadfully busy, was pulled this way and that with her calls and duties and shopings, and quite grieved that she could spare poor Amy so few minutes. Meanwhile Amy's trained nurse remained grimly silent in the background. Having opportunities not open to the public of estimating the real worth of this popular great lady, the nurse was quite aware that this friend, who was generally supposed to be so kind and attentive to the poor old invalid, was a grasping unscrupulous woman, whose friendship hinged upon the main chance. Even the presents that came from Hollacomb Manor,
the flowers, grapes, etc., were showy rather than substantial, designed to impress visitors rather than add to the invalid's comfort.

"And now for Terence," thought the keen widow, the ten minutes due to friendship being punctually discharged. She drove rapidly up the hill, and was relieved, on inquiring at the White House, to find Mr. Clancy at home.

"Terence," she began, the moment he came into the room, with a friendliness which, coming from a grande dame to a humble doctor, was somewhat intoxicating, "if I send my cart away, could you spare me half an hour, and drive me home afterwards?"

Certainly he could, with the greatest pleasure. He was quite thrilled by this flattering attention, as was natural enough. She thereupon sent off her servant with the dog-cart, hoisted her sunshade, and strolled down the steep garden with her gratified host.
There was a path half buried in bushes at the bottom of the slope, which would serve very well for a quiet tête-à-tête; and in this secluded spot the good-natured woman, with many kind smiles and delicate strokes of flattery, opened her mind to Terence Clancy.

As the stately widow swept along in her dainty morning costume, with her grand air of genial superiority, Terence felt quite dominated by her. Never a conceited man, he asked himself, "Who am I, that this important personage, merely to bow to whom in the High Street is a kind of distinction, should thus treat me as a friend—from pure good feeling, too?"

She had always been kind to him, a nameless, penniless, young general practitioner; and now, just when he was entangled in a most difficult, most delicate situation, when he knew not which way to turn, she had come to his rescue unasked. There was no difficulty in gaining Terence's confidence.
Harassed as he was, it was an immense relief to him to pour forth his troubles freely. It lightened his heart and conscience to explain to this sympathetic listener how he had been imperceptibly drawn towards Nell Tredethlyn, lured on bit by bit by circumstances until, before he could half realize what had happened, he found himself in his present dishonourable position. His listener had the less difficulty in comprehending the position since the whole story was stale news to her, and the situation itself in some measure her own handiwork. But she encouraged him to pour it all forth, saying, "It will do you good, Terence, and I'll tell you what I think about it presently." She saw that his distress was genuine, that she must needs ease his mind and conscience as a first step towards gaining her end. She understood him the better from having a genuine liking for the bright young Irishman; for, unlike most of her friendships,
this one had increased with intimacy. In truth this strong, hard woman, had a quasi-motherly affection for the weak, soft-hearted man, and was really anxious for his happiness.

"Terence," she said presently, her white ungloved hand resting upon his arm, "I tell you frankly that I came to see you on Nell's account as well as your own. Do you know that the date of her wedding is very likely being discussed at this moment while we talk? That the event will probably take place, if no steps are taken to save her, in a few weeks?"

"I knew it," groaned Terence, "I knew he had been asking her to fix the day. And she must consent; if not now, in a day or two."

"Yes; if no one cares for her enough to come to her rescue."

"I fear that's impossible. She and I are both bound hand and foot by chains of honour——"
"Forged by your own morbid inner consciousness, Terence. Good Heavens! is a girl to be bound for ever because she once gave a reluctant consent to a man whom time has shown that she can't care for? Psha! I've no patience with that sort of canting trash."

"Ah, but look at my obligations to him! He has raised me from——"

"Yes, yes, I know all about it. Haven't I had fables of Simon's generosity dinned into my ears any time these five years? I know well enough that he can be tolerably generous with his father's money: most men can. But I never heard of his stinting himself much. That precious observatory of his cost thousands—and of what earthly use is it? Professional astronomers have done all there is to be done long ago, and how much the better are we for their work? Look you, Terence, if you'd keep friends with me, don't harp on Simon's cheap
benevolence: the subject always spoils my temper. Now, I believe your only real obstacle, the thing that really sticks in your throat, is Simon's loan or gift?"

"That most of all, certainly."

"Then listen; and don't interrupt me. He shall transfer the debt to me. I will be your creditor for a few years, when you will easily repay me. Will that unloose your chain, or are you quite determined to spoil Nell's life and your own from sheer mawkish sentiment? *She'll* sacrifice herself, be very sure of that, touched as she is with some of Simon's lunacy. Her fate is in your hands. You can make her intensely happy, load her with love and care, make every hour of her life worth living, or you can bind her fast to a man whom her very bondage will quickly teach her to hate. These two courses are open to you, and if you're not man enough to choose the right one, why, you're not the good-hearted Terence
Clancy upon whom I have pinned my faith!"

The speaker was wrought up to an emotional pitch, which surprised Terence not a little; nor could he quite disguise from himself that what stirred her most was not so much affection for Nell as hatred of her cousin Simon. He had always suspected this, her good-natured jibes at Simon having an invariable thread of spite running through them; but now for the first time this hatred had poured itself out unchecked. He wished only to see a kind friend helping him, but he saw, too, Simon's enemy tempting him. Still, the pressure on his conscience was lessened; the monetary obligation might be removed—there at least was immense relief.

Terence turned to his companion, glowing with gratitude and renewed hope; she read her victory in his swimming eyes. A little more flattery, a dose or two more of sophistry, and he would be hers. Her
quick mind ran over the chances of the coming campaign, the forces she proposed to array, the opportunities to contrive. Already the ardour of the combat possessed her strongly. She felt herself pitted against Simon, and with all the odds in her favour, yet the issue well spiced with uncertainty.
CHAPTER XIV.

PARTY at Hollacomb Manor had all the surprise possibilities of a child’s bran pie. No one ever felt sure as to what would come of an invitation from Mrs. French-Chichester, whether a staid hyper-English evening in the drawing-room, with a quiet rubber, a little music, and the carriages at eleven sharp; or the liveliest of dinners followed by pool and “long drinks” in the billiard-room afterwards. The widow prided herself upon her faculty, sharpened by years of experience at rapid Indian stations, of entertaining all sorts and conditions of people—even to those unspeakable bores
her county neighbours—though after a party of this complexion she generally found it necessary to run up to town for a day or two by way of relieving the consequent depression. Some people looked grave about the Hollacombe entertainments, but she had a reputation for such good nature and cleverness, and, moreover, entertained such very big people at times, that the murmurs against her were apt to be quickly drowned in the general chorus of praise. You might meet Lord Bridistow, the reigning peer of the neighbourhood, in her drawing-room, with the Bishop of Extaple and other such magnates; or you might find yourself in a room full of country curates and their wives, for the best-dressed woman in the district, as the widow rightly conceived herself to be, liked well to queen it among "the dowdies," as she called them.

As for the young people, not one of them ever came amiss to this genial hostess. No
young woman with the least prettiness or charm about her, no young man with a single word to say for himself, ever failed of a welcome at Hollacombe. Her genuine good-nature in this respect, and love of seeing young people happy, were good points about this rather faulty Lady Bountiful, and had the effect of making the Manor House a genuine forcing house for young romance, where flirtation ripened into engagement with almost breathless celerity.

Upon entering the drawing-room this evening Kate perceived at once that the party was of a lively order; Mrs. French-Chichester's sparkle and vivacity being alone sufficient to indicate the style of her guests. In fact she wore the peculiarly audacious smile which only appeared in the bracing society of fast people. She greeted Kate with effusion, overwhelming her with thanks for taking pity on her destitution at such short notice. Her two cousins, the Plun-
gers, hovered about during these preliminary greetings and were speedily introduced; as also was the fast young barrister, who looked so uncommonly rapid, not to say rakish, as to make the brace of subalterns seem quite callow and Arcadian. Kate decided to hate the man before he had quite finished his bow. The moment afterwards she caught sight of Terence Clancy, and her hostess whispered, "So sorry, dear, but I had to ask Terence after all; one of my hussars was at Rugby with him, and I really couldn't omit him without awkward explanation."

This rapid aside was overheard by Captain Rush, who passed close to the pair at this moment, and it gave him the key to Kate's anxious looks. It was clear that she had fallen into the same suspicious groove as himself, that she feared Terence Clancy. He presently made an opportunity for pumping young Macdonald, one of the subalterns, which was easily done, since the barrister
was monopolizing Miss Tredethlyn, while their hostess kept Nell under lock and key, so to say, turning a blank eye upon the most appealing glances of her young cousins. That ill-used pair presently fell back, exchanging a scowl, and were pleased to receive Rush with civility. Kate observed that they were even deferential to him, and thus had ocular proof of what she had often heard, viz. that he was a man of some note in his profession.

In point of fact Kate had a great desire for Captain Rush's help and sympathy this evening; for Nell had carried out her resolution, and actually fixed the date of her wedding-day, and her present self-sacrificial condition might well be a dangerous one. Indeed, now that she thought herself completely mistress of her weakness, fairly launched upon the path of renunciation, her resisting power was probably at its weakest; nor was Terence one to throw away a chance
from dulness of perception. But Rush, thoroughly offended by her treatment of his father on the day of the picnic, declined even to look at Miss Tredethlyn this evening, and there was no one else to befriend her.

Julius Rush, with the usual success of a taciturn man when it pleases him to exert himself, easily drew out the beardless Plungers, learning incidentally that one had been at Haileybury, the other at Eton, so that neither had ever seen Clancy before this evening. By the direction of their glances Kate guessed that the Irishman was the subject of their talk, and was tortured with anxious curiosity. She looked almost imploringly at Captain Rush, caught his eye, and bowed; but no use, he returned her bow stiffly, without the faintest symptom of any intention to do more.

At dinner Kate's uneasiness was not soothed by seeing Clancy placed exactly
Opposite her sister, and shining with even more than his usual brilliance. Half the table was listening to him; he seemed doing his utmost to surpass himself, and Kate clearly detected a sort of forlorn-hope recklessness in the frequent glances he bestowed upon Nell. Meanwhile her next-door neighbour, the fast barrister, poured upon Miss Tredethlyn a flood of fashionable talk which in her present fretted condition was a mere waste of intellect.

It was with a sigh of genuine relief that Kate—at the end of long hours, as it seemed—perceived Mrs. French-Chichester's signal, and found herself in the drawing-room with Nell safe under her wing. Afterwards Captain Rush would help her; surely he would relent and be friendly again, when, under her direction, he might be of real service by fastening himself to Clancy for the rest of the evening. Kate was in a mood to respect him highly to-night: he seemed to be the
only man present with any real weight and solidity about him; and somehow his mortifying indifference to herself raised him in her esteem.

As soon as the gentlemen came in Captain Rush marched straight past Kate's chair, and was at once absorbed by two eager Miss Bulteels. Then, by way of putting a finishing touch to her vexation, Terence Clancy took possession of Nell with the air of one who captures a prize and means to keep it.

From that moment Kate was no better than a helpless spectator. She was skilfully entangled, first in one group then in another, by her resourceful hostess, and soon lost sight of Nell and Terence altogether.

Terence's heart beat high when he found himself in a shrubbery walk with Nell beside him. Other people were traversing the garden paths, but he knew where lay the best chance of escaping prying eyes, and Nell made no difficulty in going where he
chose. Flushed as he was with wine and excitement, this compliance of hers elated him still further. His remaining scruples had been blown away like dust by Mrs. French-Chichester's specious arguments and promises; he was now fully resolved upon fighting for Nell with all the skill, resource, and energy he possessed.

She was paler than usual. Her pure profile looked almost white against the bosky darkness of the shrubberies. Terence looked down at her with his heart in his eyes and a whirling brain. "Oh, Nell," he said, in a shaky whisper, "what a bitter hard world it is! Why must everything go wrong?"

Nell showed no resentment at being addressed thus. Her Christian name seemed to belong naturally to the moment, to be a part of the solemn intensity of this, her parting scene with Terence—for such she intended to make it.

"Yes, there are hard things," she ac-
quiesced, in a voice much firmer than his; "yet there's a keen satisfaction in just doing one's duty, isn't there?"

She accepted his meaning frankly, then? He might have foretold as much; no mock modesty or pretence of blindness would be possible with Nell. Her tone said plainly, "Of course we are both miserable, and must be, for duty demands it."

Terence felt this to be an ominous beginning, and had a chill perception that her very willingness to be alone with him, the suppressed excitement of her manner all the evening, and other symptoms upon which he had been building a handsome edifice of hope, should really have been read as danger signals. Yet this first note of opposition only intensified his stubborn resolve to conquer. If she was, as he now perceived, in the very wrath and ecstasy of renunciation, why he was possessed as vehemently by quite another passion.
"You think, then, that conventional propriety should override any such trifle as the happiness of two lives?"

"Yes, when propriety is synonymous with honour."

"Honour?" he repeated wrathfully. Honour's the most deadly fetish ever set up by human folly, and causes more misery even than poverty or ill-health!"

She looked at him pityingly. Such a sentiment coming from him—the soul of honour—was indeed confirmation of how much he had suffered.

"That is not like you, Terence," she said gently.

That "Terence," coming softly from her, backed by the glance which told far more than she imagined, helped to madden him. Without caring who listened or what might be the consequence, he gave voice to the burning appeal that had been upon the tip of his tongue for weeks.
"Nell, Nell, I love you! For months I have been tortured with this, and speak I will! What has honour to do with it? How could I tell that this fever would come upon me? It possessed me before I was half aware of any danger. You know it well enough; you know I never dreamed of injuring my friend. You've led me on without knowing it; you've robbed me of my happiness! Is a man dishonourable for being robbed? Nell, there has been no fault on either side, but only nature. You never cared for him, and can never give him any real happiness, though by clinging to him you can make us all three miserable for life. Nell, I will tell him the whole story and appeal to him, and he'll set you free. I'll give back his gift, and we'll go away together; and I'll work for you, I'll slave to make a happy home for my beautiful Nell, and surround her with love and sunshine."

Not until this moment had Nell known
the whelming possibilities of temptation. Every burning word he had said seemed true. No fault—no fault anywhere—and nothing but wretchedness before them both. Flushed by her evident weakness, Terence stooped suddenly and kissed her lips, and so released her at a touch. Crimson with shame, she thrust him back.

"Never dare to speak to me again!" she panted, with flaming eyes.

He shrank back, his eyes full of woman's tears.

"Never speak to you again, Nell? You've robbed me of heart and soul and will; you've made me half-mad by leading me on to love you, and now you leave me to groan through life alone. I wish to God I had never met you!"

With that he turned and fled through the bushes, out at the shrubbery gate, through the meadows beyond and into the Holla-comb Woods. Downwards he plunged,
with brain on fire, until he found himself by the Chilling stream, then flung himself upon a flat boulder, plunging head and face into the cool bright water.

It was like Terence to begin with overconfidence and end by giving up hope at the first serious rebuff; still more like him was the mood of intense self-pity into which he plunged as soon as the first rage of his disappointment abated. With what a sickening irony Fate always chose to treat him! No sooner was the sordid struggle against material circumstances over, the hard grip of poverty relaxed, than he was compelled to endure the pangs of disprized love; and the knowledge that Nell cared for him, longed for him, was crushing her own hopes as well as his, was like a poison in his blood. His oddly mixed feeling towards Simon, compounded lately of gratitude and jealousy, friendship and malignant envy, was settling into downright hatred of a successful rival.
Impossible not to hate a man who had snatched happiness from him, bound him with fetters of intolerable kindness. How little those fetters had hindered the action of his tongue when he poured his eloquence upon Nell just now, Terence never reflected; the memory of a man acting as counsel for himself being a watertight receptacle for evidence in his own favour, a sieve for all beside. He only felt that through this pernicious benefactor—a man all kindness on the surface, all rank selfishness within—Fate had been playing skittles with him, setting him up square and firm one moment just for the pleasure of knocking him flat the next. Between the gusts of self-pity came the weak man's longing for consolation. His thoughts turned naturally to the only person who had any real sympathy for him—to pretty Mary Pethick, whom he had not seen for so long. Her timid admiration, he felt, her innocent worship from a distance,
would soothe and comfort him, weighed down as he was by undeserved misfortune. He must see her again soon—to-morrow, if possible; or why not to-night? He looked at his watch; it was barely half-past ten. She would as likely as not be walking home along the canal at this hour, as she was wont to leave the town about ten o'clock. At any rate, it was worth a climb up to the canal on the chance of getting a glimpse of her; so without more ado he struck into a path which led upwards from the river.
CHAPTER XV.

It chanced one morning, some three weeks after a certain scene at Hollacombe Manor, that Nell Tredethlyn had an unexpected meeting with the man whom she had resolved to treat as a stranger during the remainder of her natural life.

She had seen nothing of Terence since her dismissal of him at Hollacombe, and had spent the intervening period in trying to drive him clean out of her mind, sometimes even attaining that end for, perhaps, an hour at a time. Unfortunately for Nell's peace and comfort she had not been allowed to pay her proposed visit to London. Sir
Hamo had put his veto upon it, and had lately become so peevish and fractious that, for Simon's sake, who had to bear the brunt of his father's irritation, Nell had foregone her scheme; and Kate was now staying with the London aunts and conducting the important campaign of the *trousseau* in her sister's place. Thus Sir Hamo's fondness for Nell, which seemed rather to increase with his declining health, tied her to a neighbourhood from which she would very gladly have been absent at this period. It also made possible the above-mentioned meeting with Terence Clancy.

Nell was strolling down to the lodge gate after breakfast that morning, and came upon Terence suddenly, just as she emerged from the laureled path. She was fluttered and upset by the unexpected encounter; but, collecting her forces, gave him a cool nod, and a glance containing not the least decimal fraction of a welcome.
Terence Clancy stood before her humbly, as a subject before his queen, not daring to raise his eyes to hers. No man could look more supplicating than he, nor could any show a woman more tender deference with voice or bearing. And with Nell he could not well be too humble, as he knew. His one chance of forgiveness lay through her pity.

And Terence meant to be forgiven; he had come for that purpose, and now that her rich beauty was once more before his eyes, while she herself seemed further removed from him than ever, his desire to gain her seemed to increase tenfold. Without raising his eyes, he could see how her hands trembled, and he was far from feeling as hopeless he looked.

"I must apologize," he began, with a certain proud humility, "for appearing before you at all; but Mr. Tredethlyn asked me here this morning, and I hardly liked to refuse." At this point he caught a glimpse
of the mounting colour that she was trying to keep down.

"If you wish it, however, I will decline to attend Mr. Tredethlyn any more. Such a step must of course injure my prospects; but I don't care for that, though it does hurt me to make so bad a return for your father's kindness."

"I don't want to injure your prospects," she said stiffly. Then in a burst characteristic enough in its innocent exposition of her secret, "I feel that you ought not to be here."

Sly Terence waxed more humble than before.

"I see that you can't bring yourself to forgive me," he sighed, "and I don't complain. I forgot myself for one moment, and so have sacrificed your friendship for life. Well, I shall always be a lonely man, and—and nothing matters much now."

"But I hope you will be very successful and happy; that you have a career before you."
"Happy?" He smiled sadly; his blue eyes were swimming as they met hers for a moment.

Poor Nell was harassed and puzzled. She knew quite well that she had forgiven him already—far too soon, as she admitted to herself—and it seemed hypocritical, if not unkind, to persist in hostility towards so humble a penitent. But, then, there was her duty to Simon; and yet again, entangled therewith was the duty she owed her father. Mr. Tredethlyn would be vexed—perhaps seriously offended—at this mysterious withdrawal of Terence Clancy's professional services, and would talk about it; and people might suspect that Nell cared too much for the brilliant young doctor. And surely, surely her first duty to Simon was to guard this painful secret. She turned doubtfully towards the house, Terence walking meekly at her side, but inwardly full of flattering hopes.
As they crossed the gravel sweep, Mr. Tredethlyn came out to meet them.

In the comfortable parson’s manner there was a hint of something like awkwardness, though he greeted Terence cordially as usual. In point of fact Mrs. French-Chichester had a day or two ago made a suggestion quite in accordance with her usual good sense and sympathetic appreciation of his digestive troubles, and which commended itself highly to Mr. Tredethlyn. Yet, now that the moment for carrying it out had arrived, he felt slightly embarrassed. It had occurred to her that Terence Clancy might be asked to spend a week or two up at Moor Gates, and so be in a position to thoroughly study his patient, and perhaps to effect a permanent cure of his liver malady. This might easily be managed, since Terence had not yet definitely commenced practice in the town, his present duties being confined to riding round the country to pay a few distant visits.
For the next few weeks, until the new fittings of his surgery were completed, and the new stock of drugs got in, he would probably have nearly half of every day to himself.

The suggested arrangement seemed to Mr. Tredethlyn to be full of comfort and symmetry. He pictured himself strolling about the garden of an evening, spreading out before Terence each troublesome symptom in turn, and drinking in the clever doctor's hints thereupon. But there was one obstacle to be got over; there was Nell to propitiate. Fortunately Kate was away, or the scheme would have been hopeless; unfortunately, however, Nell had also taken to avoiding Dr. Clancy, doubtless reflecting the colour of her sister's prejudice, and might now be expected to make objections. Hence the simplest, as also the shrewdest, plan would be to give the invitation in Nell's presence, and so compel her to second it.
Mr. Tredethlyn began at once to question Terence as to his work, drew from him with bland cunning the admission of his freedom during so many hours of the day, and then clapped roundly into the invitation in a manner that quite took Nell's breath away.

Terence shot one imploring glance at her; then refused, with obviously wistful regret. The refusal at once clenched Mr. Tredethlyn's resolution. He pressed the young Irishman kindly and insistently, then sent him into the garden to think further about it, explaining that he had a letter to finish himself, and would rejoin them shortly. Nell, pale and palpitating, was thus left alone with Terence to confront this awkward situation.

"Do not be alarmed," he said proudly, but with sorrow underlying pride, "I shall stick to my refusal, although—although nothing: I shall stick to it through thick and thin."
"I am sorry," Nell rejoined with difficult steadiness.

He seemed so generous and noble, so ready to sacrifice himself, that it was very painful to have to dismiss him thus; nor had Nell any fear of herself now, feeling, as she did, so braced up for duty, so sternly and invincibly loyal. She was about to dismiss Terence for his own sake alone—and thereby injure him with her father? Mr. Tredethlyn, for all his bland good nature, was thoroughly accustomed to having his own way, and quite capable of calling in another doctor, if Terence chanced to offend him; and one seceding patient is apt to draw others after him. Once more, there was Simon to be considered. What would he think when Mr. Tredethlyn told him, as would certainly be the case, how Nell had chilled Terence into refusing this invitation? Would not even Simon's suspicions be aroused?

Thus was poor Nell mentally driven hither
and thither, until she could hardly think coherently, the while Terence walked sadly by her without speaking a word, well knowing that for once silence was the best eloquence.

In a few minutes Mr. Tredethlyn rejoined them, and on further pressure from him, Terence cast a glance of such penetrating appeal at Nell that she looked a half-assent in reply—and the thing was done.

Nell had now allowed temptation to close with her, and was in for a bitter wrestle.

For this last move of Mrs. French-Chichester's was a passing shrewd one. She had felt baffled lately, and angry with Terence for his continued neglect of his opportunities; having conceived him to be a man of spirit, she now found him a tame, nerveless fellow.

But, in point of fact, this acute tactician had not yet fathomed half the deeps and shallows, the eddies and backwaters of Terence's character; it had not once occurred to her,
for instance, that, while apparently overcome with disappointment, he might have been consoling himself with another piece of love-making. At any rate, she had now provided him with a last chance of showing his mettle—if he had any.

At first all was deceitful calm. Terence took up his quarters at Moor Gates, and spent most of the first day on his rounds; then followed the quiet half-hour’s medical talk in the garden to which Mr. Tredethlyn had been looking forward with so much ardour. Afterwards, Simon came over to dinner and made Nell and Terence sing duets to him for the best part of the evening; and finally Terence drove back with his friend to spend an hour or two in the observatory, where Simon, having undertaken some rather elaborate astronomical work for an old Cambridge friend, was very busy just now.

The first day having passed in this innocent decorous fashion, Nell breathed more freely.
She began to think she had exaggerated her own danger, still more so Terence's. Why should not Simon's close friend be her own as well? She was already beginning to look upon Terence as a brother; and surely she could not be so culpably weak or foolish as to be unable to train her heart in this safe direction. She remembered some words from Middlemarch which filled her with comfort, which she could dwell upon and use as a kind of anodyne: "We can keep a guard upon our constancy and our affections as we do upon our other treasures." She thought to nail her constancy and her affection to Simon as one nails fruit-trees to a wall; and always walked about hammer and knife in hand, so to say, driving in a nail here, lopping off an offending twig there. Terence helped her constantly, showing his penitence in a hundred little ways. True, he showed his devotion also, but he evidently strove to subdue this: and the devotion was quite
hopeless, therefore harmless. She recognized it as the unspoken love of an honourable loyal man, who had once in a moment of passion forgotten his duty to his friend; and whose guard upon himself was the stricter for past remissness. Meanwhile, Mr. Tredethlyn recognized only a bright, open-hearted young friend, who possessed the double excellence of listening patiently, and treating the liver with effect.

Thus was Nell lulled into the security that breeds carelessness. She ceased to watch herself severely, allowed the sweetness of the hour to intoxicate her senses until she was like one under the influence of a drug. The summer was at its height, the August sun blazed upon moor and garden, upon meadow and stream and lustrous woodland; the day was full of subtle happiness, the eventide a poem, the twilight a vague sweet dream. Simon's frequent presence, his brotherly affections for Terence, his unruffled calm, all
helped to drown self-suspicion. Nell held his face to be a supreme proof that all things were well, and the sophistry of love wove a network over the dangerous ground across which she was picking her way.

Every morning, Simon would drive her over to see his invalid father; every afternoon be with her for some hours at Moor Gates, only leaving for his observatory when darkness set in. And then? Then Nell and her father would saunter in the cool air with their guest—or Mr. Tredethlyn would despatch the young people out-of-doors while he dozed over a book in his study. On these occasions, Terence would speak mournfully of the struggle he had gone through, of the lonely life to which he was looking forward; of how, but for the tie of gratitude to Simon, he would throw up his practice and go to seek his fortune in distant lands, where hardship and danger might help a man to forget his misery—and Nell's melting eyes would rest
upon him sorrowfully, as she gave ear to the sad story.

So passed the week. At the end of it Mr. Tredethlyn entreated Terence to remain just one week more, and this time he accepted without looking to Nell for permission. He was madly in love with her now, and knew not how to tear himself away. He knew that there was a crash imminent; the dread of it was ever present with him, yet he would not voluntarily lose a single hour of Nell's company, nor relinquish what hope he had of ultimately detaching her from Simon.

But now at length Nell awoke to the consciousness of her extreme danger, and with her awakening the struggle entered upon a new phase. Sophistry had said its say, and given place to plain actuality; she could pretend to herself no longer. She was thinking neither of Simon's happiness, nor of what people might say, nor of Terence's
prospects; but only, with a sick dread, of the coming parting from him. The thought of that parting was becoming a torment to her; the pain was too sharp to admit of further pretence. The discovery was but a slight shock to Nell, for she had now been transported out of herself. Her heart and mind were possessed by passion to the exclusion of all else, the ordinary springs of her will seemed to have dried up, the current of her mind to have cut for itself a new channel, a torrent-bed down which it rushed without check or hindrance. The power of self-criticism had gone; the collapse of her character seemed but the more complete for her former struggles. Faithfulness to Simon, until now a difficult but noble task, had become a sickening burden which she could hardly drag along from hour to hour; his single-hearted devotion an offence, his blind unsuspicion an insupportable aggravation. In her mind, surcharged as it
now was, there was no room for pity or kindness or common justice; Simon was simply the tyrant who had bound her for life to his will, who looked with smiling calm upon her despair.

Mrs. French-Chichester paid Nell a visit about this time, and went away curiously thrilled. Something in the girl's pale face and stormy eyes almost shocked her. She had witnessed a good deal of thin sentimental love in her time, but never the possession of a strong nature by a strong passion. She felt even a little scared at the course things were taking, though at the same time thrilled with keenest expectation. It was evident that the crash was at hand, and she began to wonder what might be its consequences. What of Lord Timon when his eyes should be opened? She was aware that his easy good-nature lay upon the surface of the man, that there were morbid depths in his character, and possibly
violent emotions, of which few of his friends had the least suspicion; and that his love for Nell was the taproot of his life, his trust in her the soil which nourished it. Reflecting thus, she resolved to go no more to Moor Gates until the crisis should be over, to avoid the neighbourhood of the coming explosion religiously.

Meanwhile, under Terence's subtle manipulation, under the constant appeal of his eyes, the yearning of his whole manner, his meek gratitude for every kind word she gave him, Nell's fever reached a climax. The situation was now intolerable to her; she had a craving desire first to shake off the burden of her engagement, then to flee abroad with her father, and see neither Terence nor Simon again until time and change had given her back self-mastery. One night she wrote to Simon a short pitiless note—the cry of a prisoner for liberty. Next morning, when he rode over,
reaction had come, and she tore the note to pieces without giving it him. When he was gone she wrote again, this time a letter more like herself in which she poured out the history of her long futile efforts to care for him. This gave her some relief in the writing, but she tore it up again in an hour, feeling too hysterical and unhinged to face the consequences it would entail. When he talked glowingly of the coming honey-moon and the fair cities of Italy through which they were to wander, she listened in stony silence, feeling her chains too strong to be broken.

Simon became seriously uneasy about his betrothed, but attributed her changed state solely to ill-health. He spoke to her father, who had noticed little, however, and concluded simply that the great heat was affecting her as it did himself. Then Simon spoke to Terence, and got nothing but moody generalities for his pains. Pressed
further, Terence became first irritable, then savage; and Simon returned to his astronomical work puzzled and hurt at his friend's conduct, but without the ghost of a suspicion as to the truth. Though the air was charged with the weight of the coming storm, he was quite unable to read the ominous signs that were gathering around him.

On the last evening of the fortnight, the farewell evening of Terence's visit, Mrs. French-Chichester could no longer support the gnawing pangs of curiosity; a reconnoitring expedition to Moor Gates became a physical necessity.

In order to make her visit as casual and informal as possible she decided to saunter over, if only a cool breath would come to relieve the panting afternoon, and entreat Nell to take pity on a lonely old woman, who had dined alone seven nights in succession, and come over to Hollacombe. This plan would be simple, plausible, and
sufficient; for after such a trudge on foot Nell would certainly insist upon her spending the evening at Moor Gates, and a single hour with the Tredethlyns would give so astute an observer a pretty clear impression of how things were progressing.

The walk through the woods turned out to be stifling beyond expression, and the final climb to Moor Gates up a steep lane, whose high ferny banks cut off whatever breath of air might be moving, caused Mrs. French-Chichester to register a solemn vow never to do the distance on foot again; better the ravages of curiosity than such a squandering of vital power as this.

Just as she crossed the Monks Damerel road, making for the lodge gate opposite, the exhausted widow was overtaken by Simon Secretan. She was pleased to meet him, and her heart beat quickly at the discovery that he was in a morbid, downcast mood. Did this portend the climax, the
closing scene of Simon's love-drama? would the presentiments that had occupied her mind only this morning be fulfilled? A few minutes' conversation as she toiled along, leaning upon Simon's strong arm, assured her that these hopes were premature. He spoke anxiously of Nell's indifferent health, but it was clear that his present disquiet had some other origin.

Simon was, in fact, fresh from one of those painful scenes with his father, which had become matters of almost daily experience lately; for as Sir Hamo's health declined all his idiosyncrasies grew more pronounced, and his unnatural dislike of his son took a firmer hold upon him. He would sometimes refuse to see Simon for two or three days together, then would summon his son only to carp at and harass him. Why did he neglect Nell for his paltry play-work up at the observatory? Why had he not made her his wife long ago, and so given a little
brightness and love to his father's declining days? He had always been a lukewarm lover, had slighted the sweetest girl in the world for the sake of his useless mathematics, or for benevolent schemes, that only set people by the ears. He might have given a little consideration to a dying parent's comfort and happiness; but no—any idle cottager or loafing town ragamuffin, was of more importance than the parent who had begotten him. Thus would Sir Hamo scourge his son, ofttimes cutting him with quotations from the Latin poets, or lines from King Lear about the serpent's tooth and a thankless child.

And Simon had no skill to soften his father, no feminine tact wherewith to divert or lighten the invalid's hypochondria. Too proud to defend himself, he could only return moodiness for moodiness, while the morbid vein that ran through father and son alike made between them an iron barrier.
After a more perturbing scene than usual Simon would walk fiercely over to Moor Gates with a view to taking it out of himself with violent exercise, and afterwards soothing his spirits with Nell’s company; and in this mood he had come over to-day.

Upon reaching the house Simon and his cousin were informed that Mr. Tredethelyn had not yet returned from Chillington, and that Miss Nell and Doctor Clancy were in the garden. The servant made this announcement to Mrs. French-Chichester in a specially significant manner, adding under her breath—

“Miss Tredethelyn returns in a few days, ma’am.”

The girl’s tone was a sufficient revelation that the maids were not as blind as their master.

“Well, shall we go in search of them, Simon?” Cousin Kathleen’s voice was a little shaky in spite of herself, her presenti-
ment having returned with renewed force. It might be, she thought, that Terence had screwed his courage to the sticking point on this his last day, that the hour of her triumph over Simon was actually at hand? There was a look of mingled fearfulness and gratified spite in her pale eyes, her breath came short, and her smile was anxious. If things had fallen out according to her wishes, there was no knowing what might be the final issue of Simon's discomfiture. She would not have exchanged the tingling excitement of this moment for any knowable happiness, though her extreme nervousness amounted almost to a pain.

Unconscious Simon, cheered by the near prospect of seeing Nell, had by now plucked up his spirits somewhat.

"I dare say," he remarked briskly, "Nell has taken Terence up for a look at her favourite bit of moor from under the larch clump?"
“Very likely.” Her lips formed the two short words with difficulty. “The man’s astounding blindness,” she mused, “is ridiculous—or sublime, I hardly know which?”

They threaded the garden paths, climbing gradually upwards to where the ferny wall cut off the grounds from the moor.

“Not a glimpse of them yet; they’ll be under the larches, as I said.” Simon’s voice was serene as the summer afternoon.

They were soon coasting along the low wall, with the blaze of gorse and heather on their right, and Chillington glimmering in hot mist away on their left. Then they entered the green gloom of the larches, their noiseless feet pressing the carpet of moss beneath.

“Is this blind lover,” Mrs. French-Chichester asked herself, as the dusk of the little wood encompassed them, and her pulses began to throb in her ears, “about
to emerge into daylight in more senses than one?"

The moment afterwards they passed into the open space, where the garden-seat was placed, and at a stroke the blind lover received his sight. Before him, with their backs turned, sat Nell and Terence, hand in hand, cheek leaning against cheek, mind and soul lifted up and entranced.

For a second or two Simon stretched out his hands gropingly, like a veritable blind man; then reeled forward, with brain on fire, and every nerve braced with fierce longing to injure or kill the man before him. For the moment he was no better than a madman. He seized Terence by the hips, tossed him high over his head, and strode with him to the wall, making as though about to hurl him down upon the strewn granite boulders on the other side. Nell fell to the ground, half fainting with terror. Mrs. French-Chichester, leaning chalk-white and trem-
bling upon the back of the seat, had the presence of mind to call Simon gently by his name, and the natural sound of her voice brought him back to his senses. He turned towards his cousin, and dropped his burden lightly among the brake-fern.

Then, before he had time to re-adjust his faculties or realize what had happened, she seized his hand and drew him away.

When she had got him to a safe distance, Cousin Kathleen, whose sympathies had gone over with a bound to the strong man who was trembling at her side, looked back over her shoulder. Nell was sitting with Terence’s head in her lap, wailing and moaning over him. He was unhurt, but limp and cowed with fright—without a grain of manhood left in him. Whereat the widow’s lip curled, and her contempt waxed hot. For the first time in her life she admired and respected Simon.

"Nell, Nell," she muttered, "we’ve all
been fools not to comprehend this man better—and you the worst of all, to throw him up for that pretty, sentimental, tear-stained doll yonder!"